

Defiant, Blenheim and Havoc Aces



Andrew Thomas



SERIES EDITOR: TONY HOLMES

OSPREY AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES • 105

Defiant, Blenheim and Havoc Aces

Andrew Thomas



OSPREY
PUBLISHING

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

A FLAWED CONCEPT 6

CHAPTER TWO

A BLOODY SUMMER 11

CHAPTER THREE

THE *BLITZ* 28

CHAPTER FOUR

***BLITZ* TO 'BAEDEKER' 56**

CHAPTER FIVE

OVER SEA AND SAND 70

CHAPTER SIX

THE LAST RITES 85

APPENDICES 89

COLOUR PLATES COMMENTARY 90

BIBLIOGRAPHY 95

INDEX 96

A FLAWED CONCEPT

I cut him off with Red Section and gave the order “No 1 attack. GO!” As he turned he dived down to the ground, forcing me to change over with No 3 to the starboard side. I could see my air gunner’s bullets hitting the aircraft, which finally crashed in a field full of cows, bordered by dykes, at 1415 hrs.’

With these words, written in the late afternoon of 12 May 1940, Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter, who was flying with LAC Fred King, described the destruction of a Ju 88 for No 264 Sqn’s first victory. Within moments Flt Lt Nicholas Cooke, with his gunner Cpl Albert Lippett, leading Yellow Section was also in action;

‘One He 111 was sighted at 3000 ft. Enemy dived towards the ground. I used +12 lb boost and caught the enemy on the port side at the same level. I carried out a “Defiant Cross-over” attack. Smoke then issued from both engines and I saw the enemy make a crash landing in a cloud of dust.’

The Boulton Paul Defiant – the RAF’s newest fighter – had been blooded over the Dutch city of The Hague by two sections from No 264 Sqn that had been sent to patrol the area following the commencement of the *Blitzkrieg* in the west 48 hours earlier. It was to be the start of a seesaw of highs and lows for the unit over the next few months.

At the start of World War 2 in September 1939, RAF Fighter Command possessed 28 squadrons of Hurricanes and Spitfires. A new single-engined monoplane fighter was also about to enter service, although the Defiant was very different in concept to the other types. Additionally, there remained several squadrons still flying biplane

Defiant L6973/PS-A forms the backdrop to a group of No 264 Sqn aircrew at the time of the Dunkirk evacuation. It was the personal aircraft of the CO, Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter, who was flying the fighter near The Hague on 12 May 1940 when he claimed the Defiant’s very first victory (via Alec Brew)



Gladiators, and no fewer than seven equipped with the Blenheim IF – a converted twin-engined bomber used in the long-range fighter role.

The Defiant was the ultimate manifestation of a genre that had its roots in the successful employment of the two-seat Bristol F 2 Fighter during World War 1, although this aeroplane had only begun to achieve its remarkable success when flown as a traditional single-seater scout, but with the advantage of having the observer to cover the tail. The two-seat fighter concept saw further use in the shapely form of the Hawker Demon during the 1930s, primarily because of the outstanding performance of the Rolls-Royce Kestrel-powered Hart bomber from which it had been developed.

To replace the Demon, Specification F9/35 was issued, and amongst other manufacturers Hawker proposed a Merlin-powered fighter based on its Henley light bomber. Named Hotspur, it was fitted with a power-operated gun turret – a similar configuration to the submission by the Boulton Paul Company, which had been developing power-operated gun turrets throughout the 1930s. The company's design – also Merlin powered – was named Defiant and was of a similar size to the Hurricane, albeit some 1500 lb heavier.

However, the root cause of the problems that later afflicted the turret fighter lay in Spec F9/35 itself, which specified that the design was to concentrate all of its armament in the power-operated turret and have no forward-firing machine guns. Thus in any action the pilot always had to consider the field of fire of the gunner. In part to allow Hawker to concentrate on its other work, Boulton Paul was eventually awarded a contract for two prototypes, the first of which made its maiden flight from Wolverhampton on 11 August 1937 – four months after an initial production contract for 87 had been placed. The clean lines of the prototype were marred when the turret was added, which with the gunner and ammunition contributed almost ten percent of the fully loaded weight of the aircraft. The Defiant was intended to supplement the single-seaters as a 'bomber-destroyer', but events were to prove that in a modern conflict this was a flawed concept.

With war clouds looming at the time of the Munich Crisis of September 1938, the replacement of the biplane Demon with more modern equipment became urgent. Two months later, at the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE), a Blenheim IF was fitted with a trial installation of an under-fuselage gun pack containing four Browning machine guns. Test firings were completed at the RAE's Martlesham Heath facility. Following the trials the first of almost 150 Blenheims were modified for the long-range fighter role at Nos 24 and 27 Maintenance Units. Thus equipped, the aircraft were re-designated Blenheim IFs.

The first of these new 'fighters' were delivered to No 25 Sqn at Hawkinge and No 23 Sqn at Wittering in December 1938. Blenheim IFs soon reached No 64 Sqn at Church Fenton too, this unit being fully equipped by mid-January 1939, as was Digby-based No 29 Sqn. Posted to the latter unit at the same time was Plt Off Bob Braham who, like many other future nightfighting aces, honed his skills on the Blenheim IF in the last months of peace.

In January 1939 the three Auxiliary Air Force Demon units based in the London area – Nos 600, 601 and 604 Sqns – also began receiving



The immaculate Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter was No 264 Sqn's inspirational leader until his death in action on 24 August 1940. He was also the first pilot to become an ace flying the Defiant (via Alec Brew)

Among the young future aces that cut their teeth on the Blenheim fighter was Flg Off John Cunningham of No 604 Sqn, who later became one of the RAF's most successful nightfighter pilots (author's collection)





Blenheim IFs. Flying with the latter unit was a youthful Plt Off John Cunningham, who would also soon rise to prominence as a nightfighting ace, while among No 601 Sqn's pilots was Flg Off Carl Davis – subsequently to become the first American-born ace of World War 2 – and Flt Lt Roger Bushell. A qualified barrister, Bushell was captured early in the conflict and later became 'Big X' of 'Great Escape' fame, only to die at the hands of the Gestapo.

EARLY OPERATIONS

On the outbreak of war the RAF had no specialised nightfighter units, so the Blenheim IF fighter squadrons were allocated this additional duty. A period of intense night training commenced. Amid great secrecy, trials had been proceeding on an airborne intercept (AI) radar, and No 25 Sqn received its first four AI-equipped Mk IFs in August 1939. The mysterious 'black boxes' of the AI radar were fitted amidships, with aerials on the nose and wings, the whole installation weighing 600 lb. Sgt Dickie Haine recalled;

'These early radar sets were painstakingly assembled, and began to arrive for fitting to the Blenheims. One flight of the squadron was given the task of carrying out trials and calibration of the equipment and training the radar operators.'

A handful of radar-equipped Blenheim IFs were also later issued to No 604 Sqn, the Fighter Interception Unit at Tangmere and the Special Duties Flight (SDF) at Martlesham Heath, allowing technical and tactical trials to continue through the winter of 1939-40. A few days before the outbreak of war No 25 Sqn had also received a number of longer range Blenheim IVFs.

On 3 September, with the war barely two hours old, Plt Off John Isaac of No 600 Sqn became the first Briton to die in the conflict when his Blenheim IF crashed near Hendon. Later that evening Blenheim IFs of No 601 Sqn, including one flown by future ace Flg Off Max Aitken, were scrambled to intercept a mysterious radio signal that turned out to be from a faulty refrigerator! To add insult to injury, the fighters were fired on by friendly anti-aircraft guns upon returning to base. No 25 Sqn's first operational sortie came the following day, and included Sgt Dickie Haine in ZK-J, who recalled;

From December 1939 through to the summer of 1940 Blenheim IF L8715/NG-R was regularly flown by Flg Off John Cunningham and his air gunner AC Jimmy Rawnsley. Among the other successful pilots that flew it was Plt Off Ian Joll (M J F Bowyer)

'Not long after midnight on 4 September, the as yet unfamiliar sound of the air-raid sirens shattered the night air and one flight of the squadron was scrambled from Northolt and told to intercept an unidentified aircraft detected by ground radar. Our three aircraft, in close formation, climbed through thick overcast. Later, we realised that this was the first night defensive patrol of World War 2.'



Further north at Leuchars on the 18th, Hudson-equipped No 233 Sqn formed a fighter flight with the Blenheim IF for coastal protection duties. That day three of the Bristol fighters flew an offensive patrol over the sea to a point 90 miles east of Leuchars, despite the aircraft lacking any W/T or flotation gear! Further dedicated 'coastal fighter' squadrons formed in early 1940. And it was over the sea that most early operations were flown, with No 23 Sqn flying its first real mission on 30 October when two sections covered a force of Royal Navy destroyers patrolling 150 miles out in the North Sea. A few days later No 600 Sqn received its first AI-equipped Blenheim IVFs, which were immediately detached to Manston in the hope of catching the low-flying He 115 seaplanes that were laying mines in the Thames Estuary. No enemy aircraft were intercepted, let alone shot down.

It was Nos 25 and 601 Sqns that had the distinction of being the first RAF fighter squadrons to undertake an offensive sortie over Germany when, on 28 November, the seaplane base at Borkum, in the Frisian Islands, was attacked. Led by Sqn Ldr J R Hallings-Pott of No 25 Sqn, the dozen Blenheims left Bircham Newton after refuelling at 1415 hrs, making a surprise attack shortly before 1530 hrs when seaplanes and installations were strafed – all the aircraft returned safely. Among those making their combat debuts were Flg Offs Sir Archie Hope, Carl Davis and Max Aitken of No 601 Sqn, all of whom would achieve considerable success, whilst No 25 Sqn's contingent included Sgt Dickie Haine (L1408), who recalled;

'All 12 Blenheims kept in fairly close formation as it was a murky winter afternoon, and we flew at only a few hundred feet above the dreary grey of the North Sea. An experienced and competent navigator flew with the CO in the lead aircraft. Right on ETA the Dutch coast emerged out of the mist, and a few minutes later we were able to identify the mole, crane and gantries of Borkum naval base. The squadrons opened out into wide echelon formation and dived down in turn, our four

In September 1939 Hudson-equipped No 233 Sqn at Leuchars formed a fighter flight with Blenheim IFs. These machines duly flew offensive fighter patrols some distance out over the North Sea without being fitted with either a radio or flotation gear. L8716/ZS-4 was photographed at Bircham Newton on 14 January 1940, just as the dedicated coastal fighter squadrons formed (RAF Bircham Newton records)

Blenheim IF L1437/ZK-P of No 25 Sqn was flown by Sqn Ldr Hallings-Pott when he led the successful strafe on the seaplane base at Borkum on 28 November 1939. This was the first offensive action undertaken by RAF fighters in World War 2 (Bristol via J D Oughton)





The Auxiliaries of No 601 Sqn contributed six Blenheim IFs to the Borkum raid, giving a combat debut to a number of future aces (*author's collection*)

Among the No 601 Sqn pilots on the Borkum raid was Flg Off Sir Archie Hope, who achieved numerous successes during the Battle of Britain and was later to command the unit (*Ian Simpson*)



Vickers guns, loaded with de Wilde incendiary ammunition, spraying the seaplanes, gun posts and installations. There was no doubt that complete surprise had been achieved, and there must have been quite a lot of damage done. Several seaplanes had been damaged and fires started.'

Earlier in the month No 264 Sqn had formed at Sutton Bridge under the leadership of Sqn Ldr S H Hardy, and on 5 November the first pilots arrived fresh from training,

among them future aces Plt Offs Terence Welsh, Michael Young and David 'Bull' Whitley. Two experienced pilots also arrived as flight commanders, including another future ace in the form of Flt Lt Nicholas Cooke. The unit's first Defiant was delivered on 5 December, and a few days later No 264 Sqn moved to Martlesham Heath alongside the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment to ease the type's entry into service. There, another future ace, Plt Off Eric Barwell, joined. He later described the impressions of his new mount;

'As far as the Defiant was concerned it was a beautiful machine to fly, being very stable and easy to handle, although it did have a higher landing speed than a Spitfire or Hurricane. I liked the Defiant – I was very happy with it really.'

By the beginning of 1940 further squadrons had been formed with Blenheim fighters, one being No 235 Sqn to which the only Blenheim ace, Plt Off Reg Peacock, was posted in late January. At Martlesham the Defiant trials continued, although expansion of the evaluation was frustrated by many teething problems. However, night flying finally began in February, and the Defiant's good forward visibility and broad track undercarriage made the fighter easier for landing at night than a Spitfire – a portent for the future.

At the end of March No 264 Sqn declared two flights operational and began convoy escort patrols over the North Sea from Bircham Newton. It also gained a new CO when Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter arrived, and under his dynamic leadership suitable tactics to weld the crew into a fighting team to exploit the strengths of the Defiant were developed. There followed a series of trials against bombers to evolve the best methods of attack. Hunter also flew a trial against a Spitfire to demonstrate that by circling and maintaining his speed it was possible to also counter an attack by a well flown single-seat fighter. Philip Hunter was considered to be a keen and efficient officer with a most charming personality, and No 264 Sqn soon became known as 'Hunter's Circus'.

As No 264 Sqn flew its first tentative operations, a second unit began to receive Defiants when No 141 Sqn's first example was delivered to Grangemouth, although it was not to be fully equipped until May. Then, on 10 May 1940, the German *Blitzkrieg* in the west began, catapulting No 264 Sqn's Defiants into a period of hectic action and a brief moment of glory.

A BLOODY SUMMER

On Friday, 10 May 1940, the Germans opened three simultaneous thrusts into France, Belgium and the Netherlands. On the latter front, the assault opened shortly before dawn, with attacks on airfields at Schiphol and Waalhaven by low-flying Luftwaffe bombers. Waalhaven then came under attack by paratroops dropped from waves of Ju 52/3ms, the Dutch having by then suffered heavy aircraft losses both in the air and on the ground.

Soon after the German assault was unleashed, Flg Off Reg Peacock led three Blenheim fighters from No 235 Sqn on an early morning patrol off Texel, Borkum and the Dutch Friesian Islands, which proved uneventful. However, there was action aplenty for six Blenheims from No 600 Sqn that had been led aloft by the unit CO, Sqn Ldr J Wells. Sent to counter the airborne landings near Rotterdam, they arrived overhead Waalhaven and immediately dived down to strafe the Junkers transports that had landed on the airfield. Several Ju 52/3ms were destroyed before the escorting Bf 110s from 3./ZG 1 intervened. A fierce dogfight ensued, with Wells being the first to fall. His aircraft was swiftly followed by four others, one of them flown by Plt Off Dickie Haine;

'I was attacked as I climbed away from strafing the Ju 52/3ms. In the first attack a burst of cannon fire shattered the Perspex hood above my head, grazing my helmet and destroying the instrument panel in front of me. I started to weave sharply, but the next attack stopped my port engine and riddled the port wing. I dived down to low level but the attacks persisted, and yet another burst riddled my starboard wing and shot a few feet off the starboard propeller, setting up a horrible vibration. And then an extraordinary thing happened.

'As I struggled to maintain control of the aircraft, an Me 109 flew alongside in close formation with my Blenheim. Either the German pilot thought we must be doomed anyway or he was out of ammunition and was just waiting for us to crash, but I was screaming at Kramer, my

The shattered remains of Blenheim IF L1514/BQ-N of No 600 Sqn sit on a Dutch mudbank following Plt Off Dickie Haine's forced landing after his aircraft was shot up by a Bf 110 over Waalhaven on the first day of the German offensive, 10 May 1940 (R C Haine)



gunner, to shoot him down. More shouts came back saying his weapon was jammed, but at that moment Kramer's 'K' gun burst into life at the sitting target. The '109 slowly fell back and was seen to disappear into the low scrub, and Kramer was sure he had hit the pilot, and that the aircraft had subsequently crashed.'

Haine's Blenheim IF (L1514) staggered to a crash landing and the crew managed to return to England on the vessel carrying the Dutch Royal Family.

Flg Off Norman Hayes, flying the sixth aircraft in the formation, attacked several He 111s near Rotterdam before he brought his damaged Blenheim home. Both Hayes and Haine subsequently received DFCs for their efforts.

Later that same day No 600 Sqn's 'A' Flight patrolled near Flushing and strafed an He 111 seen on the ground, claiming it destroyed. Late in the afternoon, following eight uneventful months, No 604 Sqn went into action when escorting Blenheim IV bombers of No 110 Sqn. They strafed some Ju 52/3ms that had landed on a beach near Scheveningen, claiming a number destroyed, although Plt Off Ian Joll's aircraft was hit and he force landed. The crew managed to make it home two days later.

10 May had also seen No 264 Sqn move forward to Duxford, from where, on the 11th, one section was at readiness from 0430 hrs. Later, Sqn Ldr Hunter and Plt Off Young flew a convoy patrol near the Habbisburgh lightship, returning after dark, and the following day operations began over Holland, as described in Chapter 1. No 235 Sqn was also busy, with Flt Lt 'Wigs' Manwaring shooting down an He 111 to claim the squadron's first victory.

On 13 May No 264 Sqn's 'B' Flight, led by Flt Lt Skelton, flew another patrol over The Hague in company with No 66 Sqn's Spitfire Is. They encountered Ju 87 dive-bombers, and four were claimed shot down before the Defiants were bounced from several directions by Bf 109s southeast of Rotterdam. With the Spitfires unable to intervene, five of the turret fighters fell – the first being Plt Off Samuel Thomas (in L6958), who bailed out, but his gunner, LAC John Bromley, was killed. The only aircraft to return was that flown by Plt Off Desmond Kay (later to claim four shared victories), who had landed in Belgium to refuel. The squadron was shaken, and no patrols were flown for the next few days.

Earlier that morning Reg Peacock (in Blenheim IVF L9401) led another patrol to the Hague to provide air cover for the evacuation of Queen Wilhelmina from the Netherlands, but once over the city the fighters were attacked by two sections of Bf 109s from 4./JG 27. Two Blenheims fell, although they claimed several Messerschmitts too, one being credited to Peacock. He tersely reported;

'Attacked by eight ME 109s at 0755 hrs. One ME 109 shot down

L6977/PS-U was one of five Defiants from No 264 Sqn's 'B' Flight that were lost in combat with Bf 109s on 13 May 1940. Its crew (Plt Off P E J Greenhouse and LAC F D Greenhalgh) was captured (T Kopanski)



and seen to crash about five miles inland between the Hook of Holland and The Hague.’

Others were in action too, including Flt Lt Christopher Smith of the SDF (in Blenheim IVF P4834) who, that afternoon, was vectored by the Bawdsey radar site onto an He 111 over the North Sea, which he downed off the Hook of Holland. The Blenheim was hit by return fire, which wounded Smith and set his aircraft on fire. He managed to nurse his burning fighter back to base, however. This was the first success for an aircraft under ground radar control.

As the Defiant crews licked their wounds, their Blenheim-equipped counterparts continued to find action. One such individual was Plt Off E H ‘Sam’ McHardy, a 20-year-old New Zealander of No 248 Sqn, who on 18 May claimed the first of his four victories (in Blenheim IVF L9392) during a confused fight off Blankenberg. He recalled;

‘At this moment we were joined by some Me 110s that came in to attack us. I broke away and repositioned to attack the nearest Me 110 and, after a bit of jockeying for an advantageous position, I came up underneath the belly of the aircraft and got in a good burst of fire from my five Brownings. As I fell out from the steep climb, the Me was gliding down ahead of me, so I closed to get in another burst. At the same time the gunner in the Me had a potshot at me and hit my starboard engine. A few seconds later the Me suddenly hit the sea in a great cloud of spray and was gone.’

The others in his section claimed two more victories, although in reality they had apparently shot down some French Navy Potez 631s from *Flottille F1C* by mistake.

DUNKIRK

The German *Blitzkrieg* soon split the Allied front, and in the north British and French forces were pushed back towards the Channel coast. On 23 May No 264 Sqn’s Defiants flew down to Manston to help provide air cover for the embattled troops. They flew two patrols that day that were relatively uneventful, but met the Luftwaffe on 24 May. Late that morning Sqn Ldr Hunter led a dozen Defiants on a patrol off the coast between Dunkirk and Boulogne, during which Flt Lt E H Whitehouse (in L6972, with his gunner Plt Off H Scott) and Plt Off David Whitley (with LAC R C Turner) shot down a Bf 110, thus setting the 21-year-old ‘Bull’ Whitley on his path to acedom. After a further patrol the squadron remained at Manston overnight.

Two further patrols were flown over the area the next day, during which No 235 Sqn moved down to Detling for patrols over the Channel ports. On 26 May the increasingly desperate situation in France resulted in the start of the evacuation from Dunkirk – and the birth of a legend. On that first day just over 7000 troops were brought home under an air umbrella provided by the RAF that included No 264 Sqn’s Defiants, the unit flying two relatively uneventful patrols during the day. The 27th would bring much action, however.

In the morning Philip Hunter led his men across the Channel to patrol between Dunkirk and Calais, their route easily found by the procession of ships’ wakes in the water and the grim pall of smoke hanging over Dunkirk itself. Early in the patrol, at about 0915 hrs, the Defiants were

attacked by Bf 109s, four of which were claimed to have been destroyed. Hunter was credited with one, as was Plt Off Michael Young (flying in L6980 with LAC Stanley Johnson) and Sgt Ted Thorn (with LAC Fred Barker), Young sharing a second Messerschmitt with Plt Off Richard Stokes (in L6959). Both Young and Thorn subsequently became aces.

Returning on a later patrol at 1300 hrs, No 264 Sqn found a formation of a dozen He 111s of KG 51. Sweeping in to attack them, they completely disrupted the raid by claiming three shot down and two more damaged. Flt Lt Nicholas Cooke, who was flying L7005/PS-X with Cpl Albert Lippett, wrote in his combat report;

‘1245 hrs Dunkirk. Blue Section attacked one He 111 in a formation of 12 – several bursts from each member of Blue Section in converging attacks and cross-over attacks. I could see the pilot and navigator duck at each burst. Then the enemy aircraft’s engines went on fire and stopped. The enemy aircraft burst into flames on landing. During the action we followed the enemy aircraft through several cumulus clouds at 4000 ft.’

The other members of Blue Section sharing this success with Cooke were Plt Off Terence Welsh (with gunner Sgt L H Hayden), another future ace who made his first claim, and Plt Off Whitley. Plt Off Whitehouse shared a second with Michael Young, with the third being credited jointly to the CO and Young.

No 235 Sqn’s Blenheim fighters were also out that day, with a section attacking a bomber formation off Nieuwpoort in the evening. During the late morning of 28 May Sqn Ldr Hunter led ten Defiants from Manston out over the Channel. At around 1215 hrs, when at 10,000 ft and about halfway to the French coast, they were attacked by a large formation of Bf 109s. The CO ordered the Defiants into a circle – a well practised defensive manoeuvre. Hunter’s gunner, LAC F H King, shot two down while Plt Off Michael Young’s gunner, LAC S B Johnson (in L7003/PS-L), claimed another.

The most successful Defiant crew to emerge from this clash was Sgt Ted Thorn and his gunner LAC Fred Barker, who were at the end of the circle and were hit and damaged in the wings and tail, as Thorn later recalled;

‘Enemy sighted at 1205 hrs and the CO ordered line astern on seeing the aircraft. We were not in formation when the attack developed, the leading enemy aircraft caught up the squadron and commenced to fire from astern. The squadron became broken up, leaving myself as the last aircraft in circle. Enemy fighters had a lot of tracer and scored four hits on my mainplane.’

The pair were credited with three Messerschmitts destroyed. Appropriately, however, Philip Hunter’s victories made him the first pilot to become an ace with the Defiant. Despite the loss of three Defiants to the Bf 109s, No 264 Sqn crews felt that they had demonstrated that, given the right tactics, a Defiant formation could defend itself against single-seat fighter attack.

A MOMENT OF GLORY

On 29 May the Dunkirk evacuation really got into full swing, with more than 47,000 men lifted off from the harbour and the beaches often in the face of heavy air attack, particularly in the evening. Among other losses



Pilots of No 264 Sqn (seven of whom became aces) pose for a group photograph after their successful action over Dunkirk on 29 May 1940. Standing, from left to right, are Plt Off G L Hickman, Flt Lt Nick Cooke, Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter and Plt Offs Michael Young, Gerald Hackwood, Eric Barwell, Thomas and 'Bull' Whitley. In the front row, from left to right, are Sgt Ted Thorn, Plt Off Desmond Kay, Sgt Lander and Plt Off R W Stokes. Two days after this photograph was taken Hickman and Cooke were killed in action over Dunkirk and Young was forced to bail out after colliding with Whitley, who force-landed on a French beach (*Ian Simpson*)

Defiant L6957/PS-T displays the scars following combat with Bf 109s on 29 May. The starboard aileron was damaged, the hydraulics shot out and the turret hit. This may have caused the gunner, LAC E J Jones, to bail out. Plt Off Desmond Kay managed to fly his battered aircraft back to base, where it was repaired. Jones, a Canadian, drowned off Dunkirk (*H Hensser*)

Hayden, flying with Plt Off Terry Welsh, hit another as it flew over the top of their aircraft, while Plt Off Young's gunner targeted a third, and both he and his pilot saw it plummet seawards pouring smoke. Flt Lt Cooke's gunner, Cpl Albert Lippett, spotted another Bf 109 that was attacking a Defiant, and it too burst into flames under his fire.

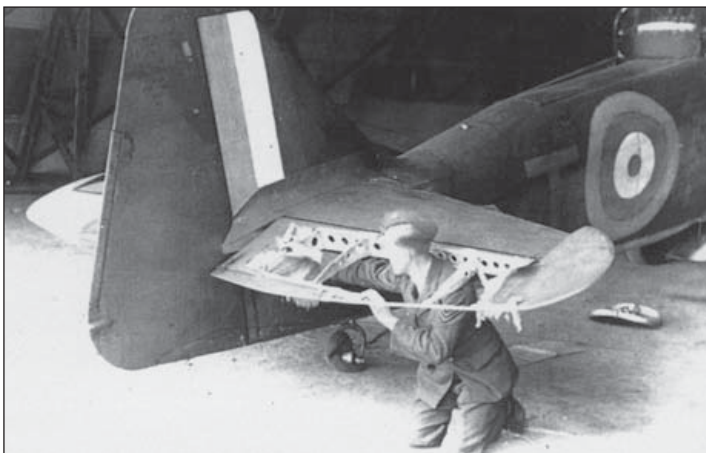
However, Plt Off Kay's aircraft (L6957) was hit by fire from a Bf 109, which damaged its starboard aileron and shot out the hydraulics. The turret was also hit, and this may have caused the gunner, LAC E J Jones, to bail out. Kay's dilemma was seen by Plt Off Eric Barwell, who remembered the incident;

'On 29 May we performed two patrols, and on the earlier operation I managed to get a Me 109, the machine immediately bursting into flames and crashing into the sea. The sky over Dunkirk was one mass of aircraft of all shapes and sizes. One of our pilots, Plt Off Desmond Kay, apparently did some very hearty evasive action and his air gunner must have thought that he was out of control for he bailed out and was lost.'

Having fought off the intervention of the Bf 109s largely unscathed, Hunter dived to engage an He 111 that he had spotted flying at only 300 ft above the shoreline. He then spied a large formation of Ju 87s,

to enemy action during the day were three destroyers, one of which, HMS *Grenade*, was sunk off the pier by air attack.

In mid afternoon Philip Hunter again led a dozen Defiants across the Channel at medium altitude, with three squadrons of Hurricanes above. The latter soon became embroiled with Bf 109s, six of which peeled off to attack the turret fighters that were deployed in line astern sections. Hunter's gunner, LAC King, opened fire on the leading Messerschmitt at 300 yards and kept firing down to 100 yards, when it burst into flames. LAC



with their Bf 110 escort, near Calais. The latter dived on the Defiants as Hunter ordered his pilots into the squadron's now proven standard defensive manoeuvre – a line astern spiral dive. Sgt Ted Thorn's gunner, Fred Barker, hit one of the Bf 110s and Plt Off Michael Young's gunner, LAC Johnson, targeted a second. Plt Off Terry Welsh dived, pulling his boost cut-out to try to solve an engine problem, while LAC Hayden, having fired at a nearby fighter, frantically tried to clear gun stoppages. He succeeded in getting three of his machine guns working and, firing again, sent a Bf 110 down into the sea. During the frantic *melée*, no fewer than six more Bf 110s were claimed, as well as four more Bf 109s that had attempted to intervene.

Flt Lt Cooke and Sgt Thorn wrote of the action after they landed, the former having now achieved *acedom*;

'Two ME 109s shot down when they were above and to starboard. A small burst at 300 yards easily sufficed. A ME 110 was above and behind us, diving on the tail of other Defiants in the formation. A small burst at 350 yards resulted in smoke and flames come from the fuselage. Claim two ME 109s and an ME 110 all in flames – certain.'

Having also attained ace status, Ted Thorn wrote;

'In formation sections line astern, flying as No 3 in Blue Section, the squadron turned to starboard to attack Ju 87s over Dunkirk. During the engagement we broke off to get a Ju 87, which obviously hadn't seen us. Rejoined formation and were then attacked by ME 110s from below. One was shot down. At this point the CO commenced a pre-arranged spiral dive to sea level and returned to base.'

The squadron flew back to Manston, before departing on yet another patrol a little before 1900 hrs. Hunter led his men back over the beaches, where they spotted several large formations of Ju 87s approaching. With their Bf 109 escort already engaged, the Stukas dived upon sighting the Defiants. Hunter did not follow, descending instead to a lower altitude and catching the Ju 87s as they pulled out of their dives above the sea. They were now at their most vulnerable. Picking their targets, the Defiant gunners poured fire into the Stukas from close range. From Hunter's aircraft, LAC Fred King set one on fire and it crashed straight into the sea – doubtless to the joy of the men patiently waiting on the beaches. Eric Barwell remembered the evening engagement as follows;

'On the second patrol I was credited with two Ju 87s, and I'll always remember that because there happened to be three of us that attacked

Seen at Kirton-in-Lindsey later in the summer of 1940, Defiant L7005/PS-X was the aircraft flown by Flt Lt Nick Cooke during his incredible actions on 29 May (via Alec Brew)



them. We were flying in line abreast and we formed under them. We then opened fire at them and they went up in flames. At that time the Stukas were only just beginning to be fitted with self-sealing fuel tanks. Their main fuel tanks were between the pilot and the navigator, and if they were hit, they just blew up.'

Many of the Ju 87s frantically jettisoned their bombs and manoeuvred wildly to escape, but Flt Lt Cooke's gunner, and others, poured fire into the vulnerable bellies. In an incredible action, Cooke and Cpl Albert Lippett were able to claim five shot down, making the former one of the RAF's first 'aces in a day' of World War 2. Nearby, 'Bull' Whitley's gunner, LAC Robert Turner, downed three Stukas, one of which crashed onto the beach, although they were themselves damaged by return fire.

Other Ju 87s had targeted the harbour, so Hunter led No 264 Sqn against these machines, once again positioning the unit to catch the Stukas as they pulled out of their dives. Both Plt Offs Young and Welsh were able to claim two destroyed apiece, whilst the combination of Sgts Thorn and Barker bagged another, and damaged two more. The squadron then turned on a formation of Ju 88s and combined to destroy one of them too, as well as claiming a second Junkers bomber as a probable, before heading home. An exhausted Ted Thorn overshot his landing at Manston, collapsing the undercarriage of his Defiant. After landing Nicholas Cooke described this incredible action;

'Masses of Ju 87s were sighted dive-bombing ships. Two were shot down in flames from 5000 ft before they had commenced their dives. The remainder of the Ju 87s were caught at sea level in line astern. On being attacked from below and to one side, they released their bombs, but three Ju 87s were shot down in very quick succession as we flew up the line. All five Ju 87s were downed in flames and crashed into the sea or onto the beach. The first Ju 88 went down following a converging attack at 4000 ft, while the second Ju 88 was engaged by a series of cross-over attacks at sea level.'

By any yardstick, it had been an outstanding day for No 264 Sqn, which was credited with a total of 37 enemy aircraft shot down – eight Bf 109s, nine Bf 110s, a Ju 88 and no fewer than 19 Ju 87s. In a confused fight such as this, and with several gunners firing on the same target from different directions, unaware of other crews' targets, a considerable degree of overclaiming was inevitable. In addition to Cooke and Thorn, Plt Offs Young, Welsh and Whitley had all claimed their fifth victories, while Plt Off Gerald Hackwood and his gunner LAC Lillie had also become aces by claiming three and three shared during the day.

Despite the overclaiming, it had nonetheless been No 264 Sqn's day, which again proved the efficacy of Hunter's tactics and the essential requirement of close cooperation between the pilot and gunner. Moreover, during the second sortie, the Defiants had indeed proven themselves in their designated role as 'bomber destroyers'. At Manston the laudatory signals flowed in, including one from HQ No 11 Group;

'The Air Officer Commanding sends his sincere congratulations to No 264 Sqn on its magnificent performance in shooting down more than 30 enemy aircraft today without losing a single pilot.'

Although a hugely successful day for No 264 Sqn, other units had suffered heavily on 29 May, including the No 235 Sqn detachment at

Detling. Its experiences were recalled in 1988 by one of the unit's navigators, Sgt Aubrey Lancaster;

'I was flying with Flg Off John Cronan. We were asked to give air cover to the evacuation from Dunkirk. The shelling at Dunkirk could be clearly heard on Detling airfield when we took off. We followed the coast north and could see the huge pall of smoke from the burning oil tanks. Suddenly, from out of the smoke, came a "swarm" of '109s. We had been told to exercise caution since No 264 Sqn, which had just gone operational with Defiants, was in the same area. However, it was not long before we saw the crosses on the wings, and not much longer after that before all three of us in our flight were in the drink! We were picked up by boats taking people off the beach and landed at Ramsgate. Our crew were the only survivors.'

The Bf 109s that had attacked the Blenheims were from JG 27, the fighters being led by Hauptmann Adolf Galland. He claimed two and the third was credited to Leutnant Igor Zirchenbach.

There was no action for the Defiants on 30 May, but No 235 Sqn and the other coastal fighter units continued patrolling over the Dover Straits – Reg Peacock flew two such missions.

During the early afternoon of the 31st No 264 Sqn set out again as part of a mixed formation with Spitfire Is of No 609 Sqn and Hurricane Is of No 213 Sqn. They headed for Dunkirk at 10,000 ft, and when approaching the coast spotted a formation of He 111s under heavy escort off to the southeast. Philip Hunter immediately swung his squadron toward the bombers, which withdrew as the Defiants approached, some also jettisoning their bombs. The Bf 109s from III./JG 26 dived down to cover them, so Hunter ordered his pilots into their well practised defensive circle. Immediately his gunner, LAC King, hit an enemy fighter, which spun away into the sea. LAC Johnson, in L6980, downed another Bf 109, but then called a warning to his pilot, Plt Off Young, as a Defiant careered into them from above. Plt Off Whitley's L6961 hit L6980 with a sickening thud that was witnessed by Plt Off Eric Barwell;

'I saw Plt Off Mike Young's aircraft separate into three pieces. I thought he'd taken a direct hit, and I saw the wings, along with the pilot's cockpit section, turn over and begin swanning down like a falling leaf, along with the aft section of the tail unit. I momentarily saw all three together, and we watched and waited to see if anyone got out by parachute from the shattered Defiant. In fact Young did get out.'

Sadly Johnson was trapped in his turret and was unable to escape, but Whitley managed to coax his badly damaged Defiant into a crash landing near Dunkirk. Whilst this drama was being enacted, Plt Off G L Hickman's gunner, LAC C A Fidler, hit a Bf 109, which staggered away, before they themselves fell to their deaths (in L6968) after being attacked by another Messerschmitt. Alerted by his gunner, Eric Barwell pulled L6975 into a tight right hand turn as a Bf 109 latched onto the Defiant's tail. LAC Williams opened fire and the Messerschmitt burst into flames. Philip Hunter then led the unit home.

Later in the evening No 264 Sqn was sent out once more, Hunter leading a patrol that again had top cover. Approaching Dunkirk, he spotted a number of He 111s from KG 27 and led his men down in a coordinated formation attack. One of the Heinkels fell into the sea after

being struck by the fire from several Defiants, while Hunter's gunner, Sgt King, hit another bomber, which caught fire and also crashed. A third He 111 fell to LAC Lillie, flying with Plt Off Hackwood, who had shared in the destruction of the first bomber to fall. Hackwood wrote;

'Another He 111 passed over our tail at about 50 yards range. My gunner fired two short bursts and the port engine seemed to explode and burst into flames, and it then circled towards the sea.'

Yet another Heinkel flew over the top of Barwell's aircraft, allowing LAC Williams to fire into its vulnerable belly and cockpit. The bomber slowly descended and two parachutes emerged before it hit the water. They then went after a second He 111, but this time their Defiant was hit by return fire and Barwell was forced to ditch five miles off the Dover coast. Both he and Williams were quickly picked up by a destroyer. Despite the indignity of having to ditch, the Heinkel's demise had taken the 27-year-old pilot to acedom.

The day was not one sided, however, as when the survivors reassembled at Manston it was apparent that No 264 Sqn had suffered a severe loss. Flt Lt Nick Cooke and Cpl Albert Lippett, in L6975, were missing. The team that had been credited with ten victories over the past 20 days had been lost.

On 3 June, following their exertions and numerous triumphs over Dunkirk, No 264 Sqn returned to Duxford to rebuild. That day the RAF's second Defiant unit, No 141 Sqn, was declared operational.

Although regarded as something of a triumph for the Defiant, Dunkirk had in reality been a Pyrrhic victory.

The Blenheim fighters continued patrols over the mass of evacuation shipping until the relief of Dunkirk had ended. Flg Off Reg Peacock led one patrol on 4 June, reporting 'hordes of men in all kinds of craft, from battleships to a small rowing boat three miles off Dunkirk containing two soldiers with a Lewis gun, pulling hard for England!' With the evacuation over the focus switched to covering other forces, notably the 51st Highland Division that was trapped near Le Havre, but sadly to little avail as most remaining British soldiers in France were captured.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

After the fall of France the enemy prepared for the invasion of Britain, with the Luftwaffe being given the key role of neutralising the air defences. What Winston Churchill, the new Prime Minister, called the Battle of Britain was about to begin.

Following a lull of two weeks, action flared up again on 18-19 June when No 604 Sqn claimed its first victory when Flg Off Hunter



Flt Lt Nick Cooke's air gunner when he made all his claims was Cpl Albert Lippett, who was killed with his pilot on 31 May. Cooke was posthumously awarded a DFC and Lippett a DFM (*Ian Simpson*)

Among the Blenheim IF units flying in the nightfighter role throughout 1940 was Wittering-based No 23 Sqn, which later became an intruder unit. This aircraft was photographed at Grangemouth (*No 23 Sqn archives*)



No 23 Sqn's first aerial success came on the night of 18 June, and it was credited to 24-year-old Flt Lt Myles Duke-Wooley as the first of his seven victories (No 23 Sqn archives)



destroyed an He 115 seaplane over the Channel. That night saw the first major nocturnal battle of the war when He 111s from KG 4 attacked bomber bases in East Anglia. It was a raid in which both sides would learn lessons, both valuable and painful. Among the units on standby were No 23 Sqn at Collyweston and No 29 at Digby, both equipped with Blenheims. No 23 Sqn launched seven crews, one attacking the Heinkel of Oberleutnant Ulrich Jordan, who recalled;

'A few minutes later they were behind us – Blenheims! The combat lasted nearly 20 minutes. The fighters attacked continuously from behind, one after another, causing a lot of damage to the fuselage, engines and tail of my aeroplane, and they succeeded in stopping one of the engines. However, the fight continued until the other engine stopped, which happened just after the last fighter disappeared.'

They had indeed been attacked by two of No 23 Sqn's aircraft – first by Sgt A C Close (in L8687), who caused the initial damage, but he was then hit by return fire and forced to bail out with his gunner, LAC J Angus. The latter survived, but the unfortunate Close was killed. Nearby was Flt Lt Myles Duke-Wooley, who saw Close's aircraft fall away on fire moments before he himself began his path to freedom. Duke-Wooley subsequently wrote;

'Climbed to engage enemy aircraft and attacked from below tail after searchlights were no longer holding. Range 50 yards. Enemy aircraft returned fire and appeared to throttle back suddenly. Delivered five attacks. Air gunner fired seven short bursts at varying ranges. After last front gun attack air gunner reported port engine of enemy aircraft on fire. Returned to base and landed.'

The He 111 came down at Cley next the Sea in Blakeney Creek, on the north Norfolk coast.

Further south, Duke-Wooley's CO, Sqn Ldr Joseph O'Brien, saw the Heinkel go down, and then spotted another bomber – '5J+AM' flown by Feldwebel Willi Maier. He fired with his front guns, as did Cpl D Little from the turret just as Spitfire I pilot Flg Off G W Petre of No 19 Sqn attacked. Rounds from both fighters hit the bomber, but the return fire was effective and Petre bailed out. Maier lost control nevertheless and his crew bailed out. O'Brien's Blenheim IF (L1458) also fell away out of control, but only he survived – Plt Off C King-Clark struck the propeller as he bailed out and was killed, while Cpl Little went down with the Blenheim. O'Brien would later become an ace.

That same night Plt Off John Barnwell – son of the designer of the Blenheim – claimed No 29 Sqn's first victory when he shot down another He 111, but on a night of mixed fortunes he too was hit by return fire and lost with his gunner, Sgt K L Long, in Blenheim IF L6636.

There was then a relative lull, with No 264 Sqn rebuilding in the north, whilst there was little activity for the Blenheim nightfighter squadrons. The coastal fighter units remained active, however, with No 235 Sqn having another 'black day' on 27 June when four aircraft were lost on a reconnaissance of the Dutch coast. One who survived was Reg Peacock, whose navigator, Plt Off Ollie Wakefield, recalled the fight (in Blenheim IVF N3542), and his pilot's second victory, over Holland;

'It was a stupendous sight, and lasted for 2-3 minutes before we found ourselves as a broken formation milling around the sky with Me 109s as

our dancing partners. We knew that the Blenheim could turn inside a '109 if we knew precisely when to do it. To this end, we had devised a system when we were under attack whereby I moved from the navigator's position, opened the cockpit behind the pilot, stuck my head out and, looking back, signalled my pilot with my thumb exactly when, and in which direction, to turn.

'We were first attacked from the upper rear port side somewhere south of Schiphol. He closed to around 400 yards and I signalled the pilot hard left and the '109 overshot. We then turned hard right and got in a burst as he went away. We were then attacked by a '109 coming in from above and to the right, with somewhat similar results.'

On his return Reg Peacock was credited with a Bf 109 destroyed and another damaged.

In mid July, as the enemy air attacks on southern England intensified, No 141 Sqn moved south to West Malling, with an advanced base at Hawkinge, to where a dozen aircraft stood by on the 19th to cover coastal convoys. At 1230 hrs the unit was scrambled to intercept an incoming Stuka raid off Folkestone, although three Defiants went unserviceable. The remaining nine formed up in three vics in line astern and, on a fine, cloudless afternoon, headed to disaster.

No 141 Sqn was bounced by around 20 Bf 109s from III./JG 51, the unit being led by the able and experienced Hauptmann Hannes Trautloft. The Messerschmitt pilots, having completed their escort mission, were in the process of conducting a sweep along the coast when they spotted the Defiants in tight formation. Having seen no previous combat, the No 141 Sqn crews ignored the tactics previously employed by the battle hardened No 264 Sqn and made no attempt to form up into an effective defensive circle. Trautloft recalled;

'I aimed at the right Defiant and the gunner's tracer streamed towards me. Suddenly there was a violent blow on my Me 109, but the enemy had to go down. My guns fired. Pieces of the Defiant broke off and came hurtling towards me. I saw a thin trail of smoke and then just a fiery ball.'

And so began the carnage. Another fell in this first pass as, hopelessly outclassed, the Defiant crews fought for their lives. Two more fell to attacks from below, crashing into the sea near Dover. Another Defiant (L7009), crewed by Flt Lt I D G Donald and Plt Off A C Hamilton, crashed near Dover, while L7001, flown by Flt Lt M J Loudon and Plt Off E Farnes, crash-landed 200 yards from Hawkinge. Plt Off Ian MacDougall's failing engine (in L6983) just recovered sufficiently for him to crash land too, although his gunner, Sgt J F Wise, had been killed during the action. Only the Defiants of the CO, Sqn Ldr W A Richardson, and Flg Off Hugh Tambllyn survived to land back at

The second operational Defiant unit was No 141 Sqn, which had just one disastrous day of fighter action off Folkestone on 19 July. One of the survivors who claimed his first victory during the action was Plt Off Hugh Tambllyn. He was to achieve aceship (with No 242 Sqn) prior to his death in action on 3 April 1941 (Don Aris)



base. The latter's aircraft (L7014) was badly shot up, but his gunner, Sgt S W N Powell, had downed a Bf 109 to claim No 141 Sqn's first victory, and begin Tamblyn's path to ace status.

In the engagement, which took less than a minute, four pilots and six gunners had been killed and seven aircraft destroyed. The action finally, and brutally, proved the unsuitability of the Defiant for day fighter duties. With No 141 Sqn having been shattered on its first operation, No 264 Sqn, which was about to make a patrol over London, was recalled to base following the debacle off Dover and withdrawn to Kirton-in-Lindsey. The surviving remnants of No 141 Sqn also headed north to Prestwick to rebuild.

On 20 July No 25 Sqn claimed its first victory when Flt Sgt John Lingard downed an He 115 off Walton-on-the-Naze, while in the early hours of the 21st a future ace had his first combat. Plt Off Archie Boyd of No 600 Sqn told the author;

'I damaged a seaplane thought to be minelaying in the Thames estuary. We failed to shoot it down because a leak in the compressed air line to the guns caused them to stop firing. The Blenheim was pretty hopeless as a nightfighter, having no bullet-proof windscreen or bullet-proof plate in front of the pilot.'

His victim had been an He 59 seaplane.

Two nights later came a more significant event when a Blenheim IF became the first radar-equipped fighter to destroy an aircraft at night. The specially trained FIU crew of Flg Off Glyn 'Jumbo'



Some of No 141 Sqn's surviving air gunners pose in front of a Defiant after the catastrophe of 19 July 1940. Third from the right is Sgt Sandy Powell, who was Hugh Tamblyn's gunner that fateful day (Don Aris)



Among the future nightfighter aces that made their first claim with the Blenheim IF was Plt Off Archie Boyd of No 600 Sqn, who damaged an He 59 seaplane over the Thames Estuary on 20 July (via C F Shores)

L8679/BQ-D was one of the Blenheim IFs that Archie Boyd flew while serving with No 600 Sqn. The fighter is seen here parked at Manston shortly before it was lost during a night patrol off Westgate, Kent, on 9 July 1940 (author's collection)



Ashfield, Plt Off Geoffrey Morris (observer) and Sgt Reg Leyland (radar operator) intercepted and destroyed a Do 17 from 2./KG 3 off the Sussex coast, as Ashfield recalled in his combat report;

'At 2300 hrs we were told to "flash weapon" (radar). After two or three minutes, contact on AI was obtained by Sgt Leyland. Corrections of H/T from 1000 ft to 6000 ft were made, as were four five-degree starboard course corrections. After about five minutes the enemy aircraft was sighted by observer, Plt Off Morris,

to port and just below. By the fuselage silhouetted against the moon, the enemy aircraft was identified as a Do 17. We flew at full throttle until just inside minimum AI range, and at about 400/500 ft I opened fire. I continued to fire until, with the enemy aircraft looking the size of a house, it gave a lurch to starboard and the nose fell away. I attempted to follow it, still firing, when the whole of the cabin Perspex was covered with oil from the enemy aircraft. Plt Off Morris reported a huge blaze behind us, slightly to port, and gave a pinpoint of contact as five miles south of Bognor.'

The air fighting intensified as the summer progressed, and although the main burden of defending Britain fell on the single-seat squadrons, the Blenheim units continued to play a part, such as on the afternoon of 11 August when the diminutive Plt Off Edward Crew of No 604 Sqn began his illustrious career in combat. He recalled;

'We were on an air-sea rescue search, escorted by Spitfires. We were then detached to investigate a report of an enemy seaplane, and found it to be an He 59, with engines running, in the sea some 30 miles from the coast. We dived down and opened up, setting it on fire. Nearby were two small German ships.'

Crew's first victory had been over an He 59 of *Seenotzentrale* Cherbourg.

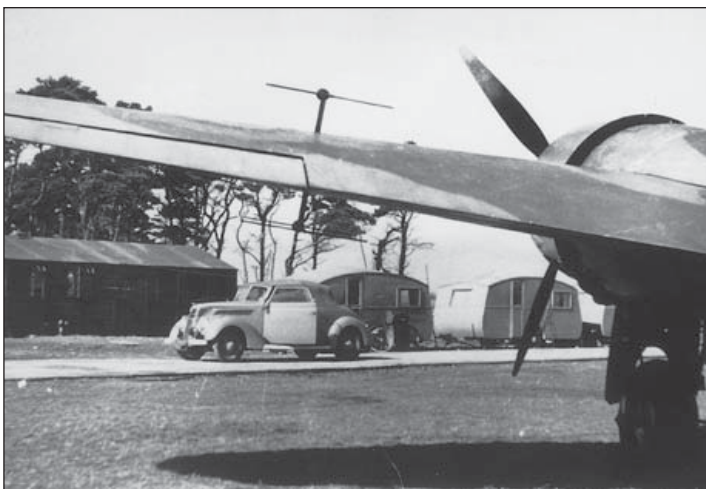
Later that same day, during a patrol off Cherbourg, Reg Peacock of No 235 Sqn's detachment at Thorney Island achieved his fourth victory, as he described;

'Upon our return the patrol was attacked whilst at 12,000 ft by two ME 109s. One was driven off and the other shot down by the concentrated fire of the rear gunners.'

Four days later, off the Lincolnshire coast, No 264 Sqn had a pointer to the future when 'Bull' Whitley claimed the Defiant's first night victory;

'The enemy aircraft was lit up by searchlights intermittently but tried to hide in clouds. It opened fire on us first, but without effect, as we raced up to attack. We got in three good bursts but lost him in clouds.'

Initially claimed as a probable, Whitley's He 111 was later confirmed as destroyed.



The Blenheim IF was the first operational type to be equipped with the then secret air intercept radar, the wing aerials of which are clearly visible in this very rare (and then illegal) photograph taken in mid 1940 (H C Goddard)

One of the new pilots posted into No 604 Sqn in the summer of 1940 was Plt Off Edward Crew, who shared in the destruction of an He 59 seaplane on 11 August to claim his first combat success. Crew went on to enjoy a very distinguished career in the RAF before finally retiring as an Air Vice Marshal (E D Crew)





On the afternoon of 18 August Reg Peacock was again in the thick of the action when he led two other Blenheim IVFs off on a local defence patrol during an air raid alert, as the unit diary described;

'A formation of about 28 Ju 88s and Me 109s started a diving attack on the aerodrome. Peacock flew straight for the leader of the lot, who broke away, followed by Peacock, who closed to 200 yards and opened fire. One of the enemy aircraft's engines burst into flames and the bomber crashed into the sea.'

The victorious trio landed back at 1540 hrs, the airfield having escaped lightly thanks to their breaking up of the attack. Reg Peacock's fifth victory (a Ju 88, claimed in L9446) made him the only pilot to become a Blenheim ace. The scribe for the unofficial squadron diary succinctly wrote, "Peahen" does it again!

Three days earlier, during the early afternoon of 15 August, the Luftwaffe raided Yorkshire when a force of Ju 88s crossed the North Sea to attack the bomber base at Driffield. As well as Hurricanes and Spitfires, the Blenheim IFs of No 219 Sqn, based at Catterick, were also scrambled. Amongst other claims, at around 1330 hrs Flt Lt Henry Goddard damaged a Dornier. Fellow No 219 Sqn pilot Sgt Dupee was hit, however, although he managed to fly back with the aid of his gunner. Both men later received the DFM for saving their aircraft, these awards being the first decorations received by squadron personnel. Also successful was future ace Sgt Arthur Hodgkinson;

'I saw a Ju 88 off my left wing. I just thought it was a Blenheim until I noticed the black cross on the fuselage. I made a quarter attack, and after the first burst the pilot of the enemy aircraft opened up as black smoke billowed from the bomber as it drew away from me. I fired off all

Crew's aircraft when he achieved his first success was Blenheim IF L6728/NG-N, which was also flown during the summer of 1940 by Flt Lt John Cunningham. It is seen here in early war markings (M J F Bowyer)

The only pilot to become a Blenheim ace was Flg Off Reg Peacock of No 235 Sqn, who flew in the coastal fighter role. This poor view is the only known photograph of him (No 235 Sqn records)



When he achieved his fifth victory – a Ju 88 attacking Thorney Island – on 18 August, Reg Peacock was flying Blenheim IVF L9446/LA-N, which was the usual mount of Flt Lt A W Fletcher. The latter pilot subsequently had a successful career flying Beaufighters with No 272 Sqn in the Mediterranean (No 235 Sqn records)

One of the rare daylight actions involving Fighter Command Blenheims during the Battle of Britain took place on 15 August 1940 when the Luftwaffe targeted the northeast of England. Aircraft from No 219 Sqn were scrambled and crews made several claims. L1105/FK-S is seen shortly before this action in slightly embarrassing circumstances! (*H C Goddard*)



my ammunition, and could see smoke from the aircraft, but it failed to come down. No return fire noticed. One enemy aircraft damaged.'

Plt Off Johnny Topham was more successful, chasing his prey some 100 miles east of the English coast;

'My line astern attack on a Ju 88 continued for 50 miles before I could get within range. "Red 2" and I then attacked together, performing dive attacks until all our ammunition was expended. Following each burst we spotted black smoke pouring out from first one engine and then the other. We also noted a belly gunner hanging half out of the under turret gun position. Recovering from one attack, the enemy attempted to ram my machine head on, but passed some ten yards beneath me. I saw the second gunner apparently laying dead over his gun – two people were sat side by side in the front cockpit.'

The future ace's first claim (in Blenheim IF L8724) was credited as a probable, but it may indeed have been confirmed later.

DEATH OF A CONCEPT

A few days later No 264 Sqn again transferred to No 11 Group and the cauldron of the southeast when it was sent to Hornchurch, with a forward base at Manston once again. Early on 24 August three sections took off at 0700 hrs after refuelling at Manston, but they were recalled. The Defiants were ordered off again before lunch, returning to Manston just as the airfield came under attack by a formation of Ju 88s. The Defiant crews fought a series of individual combats as the bombers flattened out from their dives, and three were shot down by Sqn Ldr George Garvin, Sgt Ted Thorn and Plt Off David Whitley (his last success). Eric Barwell (in N1576) claimed an 'He 113' while chasing the Junkers bombers;

'I followed them down and was attacked by five "He 113s" (actually Bf 109s – author). I got astern of the "He 113s" and fired 120 rounds at the second. It immediately burst into flames and dived into the sea.'

However, three Defiants were lost, including No 264 Sqn's inspirational commander Philip Hunter (in N1535) and his gunner Sgt F H King, who were last seen chasing the bombers towards France. The loss of the Defiant's greatest proponent was a huge blow.

Among the future aces that claimed in No 219 Sqn's action of 15 August was Plt Off Johnny Topham, who later achieved 13 victories (*via T W Kitching*)



Having returned to Hornchurch at 1540 hrs, No 264 Sqn crews were soon ordered aloft to orbit their base and counter another raid. Seven Defiants took off, but the order had been given too late and bombs were already dropping from a large formation of Ju 88s and He 111s, with a Bf 109 escort, as the fighters raced across the grass. Sqn Ldr Garvin was able to claim a Ju 88 destroyed, as did Terry Welsh;

'I sighted 13 Ju 88s in line astern formation. I picked out a straggler and carried out a beam attack, and then attacked another from the front. I was then attacked by two '109s. I returned their fire and one aircraft shuddered and broke off the engagement.'

Michael Young, having become separated from the main formation, found a solitary He 111, which he destroyed in an overtaking attack. It had been a tough day, however, with four crews lost in total. Replacement aircraft were quickly delivered, but many had to be hastily modified at Hornchurch so as to make them ready for combat. Sterling work by the groundcrews meant that a ten-aircraft patrol was flown the following evening.

At noon on 26 August No 264 Sqn was ordered to intercept an approaching formation of Do 17s, heavily escorted by Bf 109s, as they neared Dover. The enemy aircraft were spotted at 12,000 ft between Herne Bay and Deal, and as the Defiants climbed to attack the bombers, they were in turn set upon by the escort. Flt Lt A J Banham (in L6985), having destroyed a Dornier, took to his parachute after his aircraft was set on fire by a Bf 109. His gunner, Sgt B Baker, was killed. Fellow recent arrival Plt Off Desmond Hughes had a more successful start to a lengthy combat career, however, as his gunner, Sgt Fred Gash, downed two of the



The nearest Defiant of No 264 Sqn is N1535/PS-A, in which Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter led the squadron into action in the Battle of Britain during late August. He was ultimately lost in this machine whilst chasing a Ju 88 over the Channel on the 24th of the month. Behind N1535 is L7026/PS-V, which Plt Off Eric Barwell used to shoot down a Bf 109 on the same day Hunter was killed. This was Barwell's sixth victory (A W Hall)

Three of No 264 Sqn's Defiants tuck in close in July 1940, shortly before moving south. The nearest one, L7013, was damaged by Bf 109s on 24 August, whilst L7025/PS-Z was shot down two days later (A W Hall)





Defiant L7021/PS-H awaits its next sortie at Hornchurch on 25 August 1940. The previous evening Plt Off 'Bull' Whitley had used it to shoot down a Ju 88 for his final victory – he was killed on the 28th. L7021 was also lost that same day, resulting in the deaths of Plt Offs P L Kenner and C E Johnson (Mol via P H T Green Collection)

bombers with converging attacks. The team of Sgts Ted Thorn and Fred Barker also claimed a brace of Dorniers, but they too were then hit (in L7005) by the escort. When preparing for a forced landing near Herne Bay, a Bf 109 closed on them and, using his remaining ammunition, Barker shot it down.

Despite further losses, No 264 Sqn remained in good heart, but 28 August was to be its last active day during the Battle. At 0830 hrs raids began to be plotted, and as they approached Rochford the unit was ordered off to patrol Dover. Twenty He 111s, escorted by JG 26, were encountered near Folkestone, and the Defiants were soon split up and several aircraft went down. One (N1574) was flown by 'Bull' Whitley, who, with Sgt Turner, was killed. Among others, Plt Off Jim Bailey – a future ace – had to make a forced landing in N1569;

'There were about 20 or 30 Heinkels flying in sections of three, line astern. My gunner began to fire. I concentrated on keeping formation. The four Brownings stuttered above my head. "Bull" Whitley moved over and sat just in front of me. Ours – I never saw it – fell out with flames pouring from one engine, so my gunner, Sgt O A Hardy, told me later. The Heinkels looked as big as elephants. Soon after making my first claim I felt jolts or rattles all over my own aircraft. I flicked over and spiralled for the ground in a controlled blackout. The engine died, so we dodged between poles, crashed through the brush and landed comfortably on the verge.'

Desmond Hughes wrote of the event;

'During the week we were at Hornchurch we lost five pilots and nine gunners. The losses included the squadron commander, the squadron commander designate and both flight commanders killed or wounded. On 29 August the half-dozen machines that were flyable took off for Kirton-in-Lindsey, in Lincolnshire, led by 20-year-old Plt Off 'Tommy' Thomas, the most senior pilot left on the squadron.'

It was the end for the Defiant as a day fighter, and A E Housman's words written in tribute from an earlier war seem apposite to mark the passing of the Defiant from the day fighting role:

*Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood and earth's foundation's stay;
What God abandoned they defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay.*

THE *BLITZ*

Although the air battles over southern England raged by day, there were also increasing incursions by Luftwaffe bombers at night, and these became largely the province of the Blenheim squadrons. Although the day assault would continue for several more months, it was in countering the increasing number of night raids that the Defiant and Blenheim squadrons would concentrate on. Serving with Warmwell-based No 604 Sqn at this time was future ace Flt Lt Rory Chisholm, a pre-war Auxiliary pilot who was most frustrated at the way the war was being fought in those early days of nightfighting:

‘We found our Blenheim IFs being fitted with “magic mirrors”. This equipment consisted of a radio transmitter and receiver and the necessary aerials. But to us it was only AI, and we were sceptical about the value of the “magic mirrors”.

‘On the night of 16 August 1940 my crew and I were ordered to patrol near Bristol. This was it. I stumbled out into the darkness that enveloped the airfield, feeling scared but stoical. I hurried as best I could towards the aircraft and the attendant groundcrew that were waiting. We took off and headed northwest for Bristol. Once at 15,000 ft over the city we saw that it was being blitzed below us. I saw bombs explode and plenty of fires. I had to tell the fighter controller that I could see no enemy aircraft. I rarely got to look out of the cockpit as my attention was concentrated on trying to keep this normally stable aircraft on an even keel. I would have to pore over the instruments as they danced before my eyes. And so it went on until I was told to come home.

‘As nightfighters we were wholly ineffective. We could not find the enemy aircraft, and even if we had been able to, our Blenheim IFs, though improved now by the removal of their turrets, were too slow to overhaul them. The radar was unreliable and the operators too inexperienced to use it.’

It was a sense of impotence that many were to feel through the coming months.

It was not all gloom and doom, however, as during the early morning of 18 August Plt Off R A Rhodes, accompanied by Sgt W J ‘Sticks’ Gregory, of No 29 Sqn stalked a bomber for more than an hour and shot it down off Spurn Head, Sgt Gregory finishing it off with the turret gun. Rhodes was shot down and killed just a week later, but Gregory later formed a very successful team with Flg Off Bob Braham. On the night of the 24th, the latter was off the Humber when he was vectored towards an aircraft illuminated by searchlights. Closing to 500 yards, he opened fire and then allowed his gunner to get in a few bursts too. Braham broke off his attack at 100 yards, leaving the He 111P of III./KG 55 to limp away and crash in the Humber. It was the first of Braham’s 29 victories, but the only one he claimed with the Blenheim.

Identification remained problematical, as was brutally brought home on the night of 3 September when two of No 25 Sqn’s Blenheim IFs were shot down in error by Hurricanes over Essex. The following night



Blenheim IFs of No 25 Sqn await their next sorties at Debden in October 1940, shortly before they were replaced by Beaufighter IFs (No 25 Sqn records)

The most successful Blenheim pilot in the nightfighter role was 19-year-old New Zealander Plt Off Mike Herrick who, in September, shot down three German bombers. He became an ace the following year, and later served with the RNZAF in the Pacific. Herrick was killed in action on 16 June 1944 off Denmark in a Mosquito FB VI of No 305 'Polish' Sqn (RNZAF)



a large Luftwaffe bomber force headed for Liverpool, and among those up on patrol from North Weald was New Zealander Plt Off Mike Herrick of No 25 Sqn. The future ace broke his 'duck' when he attacked He 111H-3 'V4+AB' of *Stab*/KG 1, which went down near Braintree, killing Major Maier's crew. Thirty minutes later he shot down He 111 '1H+AM' (flown by Feldwebel Ewarts) of 4./KG 26 near Rendlesham. Herrick stated in his combat report that 'the searchlights were most effective and, of course, entirely responsible in enabling me to sight and fire at the enemy'. His friend Plt Off N H 'Paddy' Corry recalled the night's events;

'Mike suddenly found himself right up the backside of a big fat Heinkel (as a result of guidance from the ground controller) and did everything just about right. Then, on the way home, he nearly collided with a second Heinkel – which fell to pieces after a burst fired at less than 30 yards. I believe it was the first of the two bombers that gave Mike a bad time. During his attack Mike's windscreen was shattered and he had Perspex debris in his eyes, which made his second visual contact and attack all the more remarkable.'

Herrick tasted success once again when, with Plt Off A W Brown as gunner and AC F Fildes as AI operator, he shot down another He 111 over Newman's End, Essex, on the night of 13/14 September.

With night raids now increasing in frequency, two days later, on 16 September, No 600 Sqn sent a detachment forward to Redhill. That night, having taken off from the Surrey airfield, Flt Lt Charles Pritchard shot an He 111 down into the sea in flames, as his gunner, Plt Off Henry 'Jake' Jacobs recalled;

'Charles pressed the tit and hose-piped him with his four Brownings while I whooped "Bits and pieces are coming off him!" Of course bits and pieces were also coming *from* him too in the shape of bullets pouring from his turret in our direction, but he started to burn and, as we slowly overtook him, Charles allowed me to empty a drum of ammo into him. Well on fire, the Heinkel crashed near Bexhill. Twenty-five minutes later, we were safely down on the ground.'

At the same time No 25 Sqn had a sight to the future when it conducted trials with a Douglas Boston to assess its suitability as a nightfighter. The French had originally ordered the American twin-engined tactical bomber as the DB 7, and following the fall of France

undelivered examples had arrived in Britain from the USA. Named the Boston I by the RAF, it was seen as having a useful capability as both a nightfighter and night intruder. Most Boston I/II's were modified for these roles, eventually being re-named Havoc I/II's. They came in two basic variants – the intruder, with a three-man crew, glazed nose, five 0.303-in machine guns and a useful bomb load, and the nightfighter, equipped with an AI Mk IV radar, a two-man crew and eight 0.303-in machine guns.

At Turnhouse on 30 August 1940, No 141 Sqn's role was officially changed to nightfighting, and two weeks later Flt Lt T B Fitzgerald took 'B' Flight south to Biggin Hill as part of London's defences. It soon become involved in defending the capital, Plt Off John Waddingham and his gunner Sgt Alf Cumbers attacking two He 111s off the south coast on the night of 16-17 September. They destroyed one and probably downed the other to claim the unit's first night victories. No 141 Sqn bagged another Ju 88 the following night.

'A' Flight was now based at Gatwick, and the tribulations of operating from this advanced airfield were noted by Plt Off 'Ben' Benson;

'I was with the detachment at Gatwick, and the problems of flying at night in the ack-ack zone were considerable. We were still in Defiants, and my gunner was a chap by the name of Leonard Blain. During October we were sent to Biggin Hill to cover night flying operations. I will always remember my first night patrol from here. I took off with the aid of the six glim lamps, which were immediately extinguished as I got into the air. The airfield was being bombed at the time. I was shot at by the airfield defences as I took off, coned by searchlights soon after and then got lost in cloud, only to find that my radio had packed up!

'I had been told that if I was lost I should look for a blue searchlight. Having never seen a searchlight from the air before, I found that they all looked blue as I approached them! To my horror, however, each time I tried to get a homing from one of them, I was coned or followed around. I decided that it would be safer in cloud, despite the fact that I was completely lost. We were rescued from the necessity of having to bail out by the action of a brave man at Gatwick. He turned on the flashing beacon in the middle of an air raid, thereby enabling us to do a rather dicey landing there.'

— NEW SQUADRONS —

As autumn approached, and suffering increasingly heavy losses by day, the Luftwaffe steadily increased night raids on British cities that were to endure the so-called *Blitz* until the following spring. At one stage London was attacked on no fewer than 76 consecutive nights. The RAF nightfighter defences were gradually strengthened, however, with deliveries commencing of the highly effective Beaufighter IF from September 1940, whilst additional squadrons were formed with Defiants. That same month, for example, Polish-manned No 307 Sqn received the first of its Defiants at Kirton-in-Lindsey, before moving to Jurby for patrols over the Irish Sea.

On 14 October the enemy mounted its heaviest night attack thus far when 380 bombers struck London just as No 264 Sqn had begun to establish itself in the nightfighter role. Plt Off Desmond Hughes and Sgt

At the end of 1940 No 255 Sqn was one of a number of new nightfighter units to be equipped with the Defiant, although some of its aircraft – like N3333/YD-B, seen here at Cranwell in December 1940 – were delivered in day fighter camouflage. This particular machine was occasionally flown by future ace Flt Lt Richard Trousdale. On 9 January 1941 it flew No 255 Sqn's first patrol, with Sgts Dale and Plant at the controls, in the Sheffield-Derby area. Two months later, on 7 March, Plt Off Ballantyne and Sgt McTaggart were on a night test flight when they encountered an He 111 in very poor weather and managed to damage it (via G R Pitchfork)



Fred Gash were in action on the night of the 15th during a raid on the capital, Hughes recalling:

'It was a bright moonlight night. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something move across the stars out to my left. If you are scanning the night sky it is normally completely still, so anything that moves attracts the eye. This just had to be another aircraft. I got Fred to swing his turret around and we both caught sight of a row of exhausts. It was a twin-engined aircraft.

'I slid alongside, below and to the right of him, and slowly edged in "under his armpit" while Fred kept his guns trained on the aircraft. Then we saw the distinctive wing and tail shape of a Heinkel – there was no mistaking it. I moved into a firing position, within about 50 yards of the wingtip and slightly below, so that Fred could align his guns for an upward shot at about 20 degrees. Obviously the German crew had not seen us, for they continued flying straight ahead.

'Fred fired straight into the starboard engine. One round in six was a tracer, but what told us we were hitting the Heinkel was the glitter of de Wilde rounds as they ignited on impact. Fred fired, realigned, and fired again. He got off two or three bursts. There was no return fire from the bomber – indeed, I doubt if any guns could have been brought to bear on our position on its beam. The engine burst into flames, then the Heinkel rolled on its back, went down steeply and crashed into a field near Brentwood.'

Also airborne in a Blenheim from No 23 Sqn earlier that same night was Flg Off Philip Ensor – soon to become a leading intruder pilot – who sighted an inbound He 111 off the coast near Brighton at 13,000 ft, so presaging a 15-minute chase using AI radar. Eventually he closed on a Heinkel over central Kent, opening fire with a three-second burst, followed by another, longer, burst that caused the starboard engine to explode. The bomber came down near Redhill, so starting Ensor's path to acedom. He damaged another He 111 four nights later.

It was not only London that suffered, for on 14 November Coventry was hit by one of the severest raids of the war when more than 500 bombers from *Fleigerkorps* I, II and V targeted the city's factories and industrial infrastructure. The attack caused huge damage, including the destruction of its Gothic Cathedral and the death of around 600 civilians. The Defiant and Blenheim squadrons alone flew more than 60 sorties in defence of Coventry, but to no avail as the city centre was largely destroyed by the German bombers with little interference from the RAF.

Nine days later, on 23 November, two new Defiant nightfighter squadrons began to form – No 255 at Kirton-in-Lindsey and No 256 at Catterick – and immediately commence their work-ups to combat readiness. Amongst the pilots in the latter unit was future ace Plt Off Dennis Hughes, whilst No 255 Sqn came under the temporary command of Flt Lt Richard Trousdale (also later



Another Defiant unit that saw its first action during the latter part of the *Blitz* was No 256 Sqn, based at Woodvale. One of its aircraft was N1744/JT-S, which was the regular mount of future ace Plt Off Dennis Hughes during the spring of 1941 (D H Wood)

Plt Off J G 'Ben' Benson of No 141 Sqn gained the first of his ten victories in a Defiant during the early months of the *Blitz*. With no aids to find the enemy, he often flew with the cockpit hood open! (J G Benson via Don Aris)



an ace) until Sqn Ldr R L Smith arrived. Plt Off 'Gill' Hayton, another future ace, also joined the unit in December as the deputy commander of 'B' Flight.

During the long dark winter nights, the effectiveness of the Defiants, reliant on visual detection, was always going to be limited, as No 141 Sqn's Plt Off J G 'Ben' Benson ruefully commented;

'We had some desperate nights in December patrolling over the centre of London during the *Blitz*, trying to pick out German bombers against the glow of the fires. On these occasions we had to fly with the cockpit hood open, having no indication as to the height of the raiders. The nearest we got to one was when we nearly had a head-on collision with a Heinkel going in the opposite direction.'

This was, however, in marked contrast to the experiences of No 604 Sqn's Plt Off Ian Joll, who flew an AI-equipped Blenheim towards a target south of the Needles in December 1940;

'The AI operator had already turned on his set and was able to tell me that I was overtaking slightly. Shortly after this I lost sight of the enemy temporarily when his silhouette merged with the top of a cloudbank on the horizon. I continued to chase and was told by the AI operator that the enemy aircraft was slightly to starboard and on the same level, and that we were steadily overtaking. I saw it against the moon and identified an He 111. I closed in to about 300 yards' range, slightly on the port quarter, and gave him a five-second burst, which appeared to go close to his rudder. The enemy aircraft then dived steeply towards the clouds and was lost to us. Throughout the interception the AI worked perfectly, and it was of very great assistance.'

Despite his misgivings, it was Plt Off Benson who claimed No 141 Sqn's next victory when patrolling over the Sussex coast with his gunner, Sgt Leonard Blain. On the evening of 22 December the Luftwaffe targeted Manchester, and among the aircraft despatched was He 111P 'G1+PL' of 3./KG 55, flown by Unteroffizier Bruno Zimmermann. This was the bomber that Benson attacked;

'I started off on a dusk patrol, when the setting sun was still giving a bright glow and the visibility above the cloud was perfect. Over the coast, somewhere in the vicinity of Hastings, the controller vectored me onto an enemy aircraft heading for London. I then caught sight of him at 16,500 ft. I kept well out of his sight, staying underneath him, so as to get into a satisfactory firing position. All the while I made full use of the dark sky background.

'My gunner directed his initial burst of fire at the lower gun turret and port engine and his last two bursts at the pilot, and I believe that it may have been the rear gunner that I saw fall from the bottom of the aeroplane after the first burst. I am fairly confident that it was a Heinkel 111. I went round in front of him and flew forwards and backwards underneath him. He took no evasive action whatsoever,



probably because of the complete surprise of the attack. I then saw smoke coming from both engines and flames from the fuselage. To make certain that the enemy aircraft was quite destroyed, I watched it go down in a shallow spiral dive, crash into the ground and blow up near Etchingham.'

This was the last victory claimed by a Defiant in 1940, despite the City of London being so heavily hit on 29 December that the resulting firestorm destroyed much of its historical centre.

INTRUDERS!

By October 1940 it was evident that German bombing tactics had changed in favour of night attacks. One means of blunting the threat would be to attack the enemy bombers as they took off or landed from bases in occupied Europe, and in December the experienced Blenheim IF-equipped No 23 Sqn was converted to the intruder role. Navigators were posted in and its Blenheims fitted with external racks to allow the carriage of small bombs – the still secret AI radar equipment was also removed. Among the pilots serving with the unit at this time was New Zealander Flg Off Alan Gawith, who told the author;

'All the aircrew were delighted at the prospect of switching over to the offensive after long months of tedious and none too successful defensive patrols. Our only concern was whether our rather worn-out old Blenheims would stand up to the longer flight across to the Continent. But as things turned out they performed the task nobly, and there were seldom reports of engine trouble.'

No 23 Sqn flew its first intruder mission on 21 December when six Blenheims went to Abbeville. Sortie timing was of course critical, as was a high standard of navigation. Success was not long in coming, for on the night of 2 January 1941 Plt Off Philip Ensor was near Caen when he spotted an aircraft that was trailed to Dreux, as he recorded in his Combat Report;

'We attacked from beam astern, opening fire at 100 yards and closing to 30 yards before we broke away. On our first burst we perceived a bright flash emanate from the stern, and bits and pieces could be seen flying off. We broke to port, turned and delivered a second attack until our ammunition ran out.'

The He 111 (from *Stab*/KG 55) that he had attacked was claimed as a probable, although in fact the bomber had crash-landed at Villacoublay.

No 23 Sqn's first confirmed victory whilst intruding came on 17 January when Flg Off D A Willans caught an (*text continues on page 46*)

No 141 Sqn Defiant N1752/TW-L flew one of the first intruder sorties over France when, on the evening of 11 December 1940, Plt Offs 'Ben' Benson and Blair flew to Abbeville to find returning enemy bombers. The regular mount of Flt Lt Waddington, it was often flown by Plt Off Noel Constantine, who would later find success during the Burma campaign (Dr M Whitnall)

COLOUR PLATES

1

Blenheim IF L8715/NG-R of Flg Off J Cunningham, No 604 'County of Middlesex' Sqn, North Weald, December 1939



2

Blenheim IF L8726/FK-M of Plt Off J G Topham, No 219 Sqn, Catterick, February 1940



3

Blenheim IF L8723/RE-A of Plt Off R R Smith, No 229 Sqn, Digby, February-March 1940



4

Blenheim IF L1373/RO-J of Plt Off J R D Braham, No 29 Sqn,
Debden, March 1940



5

Defiant I L6973/PS-A of Sqn Ldr P A Hunter, No 264 Sqn,
Duxford, May 1940



6

Defiant I L6957/PS-T of Plt Off T D Welsh, No 264 Sqn,
Manston, 25 May 1940



7

Blenheim IF L8680/NG-Q of Plt Off I K S Joll, No 604
'County of Middlesex' Sqn, Manston, June 1940



8

Blenheim IF L8679/BO-D of Plt Off A D McN Boyd,
No 600 'City of London' Sqn, Manston, July 1940



9

Defiant I L7013/PS-U of Plt Off E G Barwell, No 264 Sqn,
Fowlmere, 12 July 1940



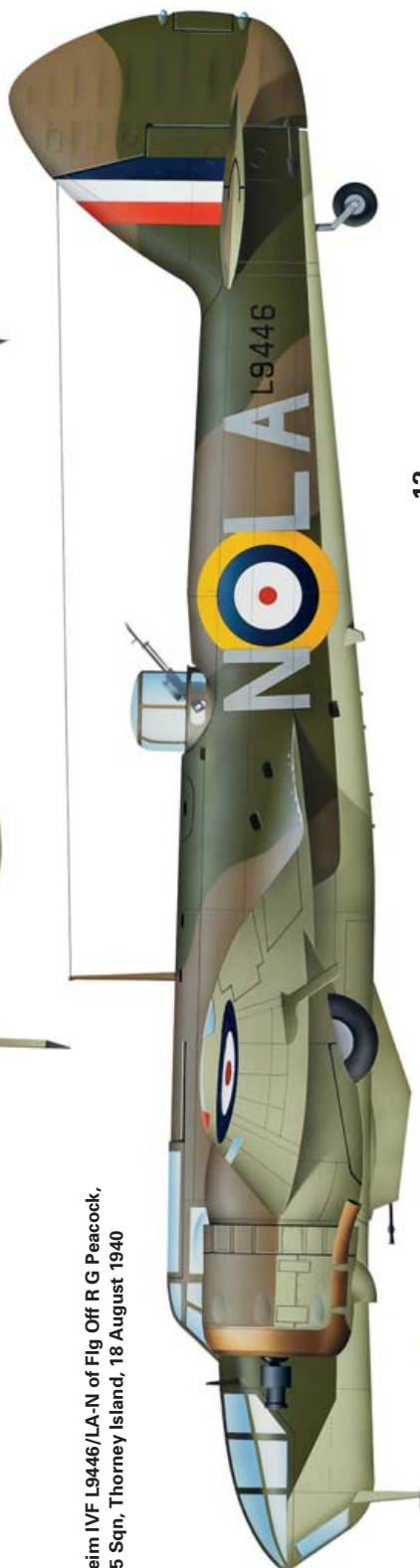
10

Defiant I N1564/TW-T of Flg Off H N Tamblyn, No 141 Sqn, Prestwick, July 1940



11

Blenheim IVF L9446/LA-N of Flg Off R G Peacock, No 235 Sqn, Thorney Island, 18 August 1940



12

Defiant I L7021/PS-H of Plt Off D Whitley, No 264 Sqn, Hornchurch, 24 August 1940



13

Defiant I L7026/PS-V of Plt Off E G Barwell, No 264 Sqn, Hornchurch, 24 August 1940



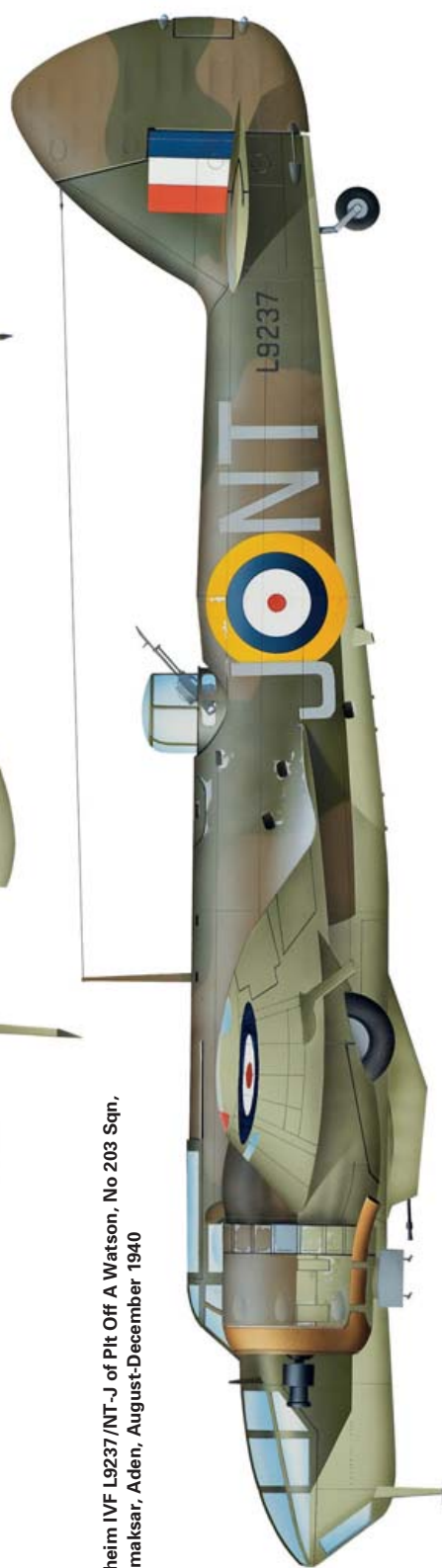
14

Defiant I L7005/PS-X of Sgt E R Thorn, No 264 Sqn, Hornchurch, 26 August 1940



15

Blenheim IVF L9237/NT-J of Plt Off A Watson, No 203 Sqn, Khormaksar, Aden, August-December 1940



16

Defiant I L7018/PS-O of Plt Off G H Hackwood, No 264 Sqn, Kirton-in-Lindsey, 7 October 1940



17

Defiant I N1801/PS-Y of Plt Off F D Hughes, No 264 Sqn, Debden, Gravesend and Biggin Hill, December 1940 to April 1941



18

Defiant I N1752/TW-L of Plt Off J G Benson, No 141 Sqn, Gravesend, 11 December 1940





19

Defiant I N3313/PS-P of Sqn Ldr P J Sanders, No 264 Sqn, Debden and Biggin Hill, December 1940 to February 1941



20

Defiant I N3333/YD-B of Flt Lt R M Trousdale, No 255 Sqn, Kirton-in-Lindsey, December 1940 to February 1941



21

Defiant I N3328/DZ-Z of Sgt H E Bodien, No 151 Sqn, Wittering, 26 February 1941

22

Defiant I N3377/PS-J of Flg Off M H Young, No 264 Sqn, Biggin Hill and West Malling, February to May 1941



23

Blenheim IF K7179/VT-B of Flg Off R T P Davidson, No 30 Sqn, Eleusis, Greece, March-April 1941



24

Defiant I N1744/JT-S of Plt Off D L Hughes, No 256 Sqn, Squires Gate, April-May 1941



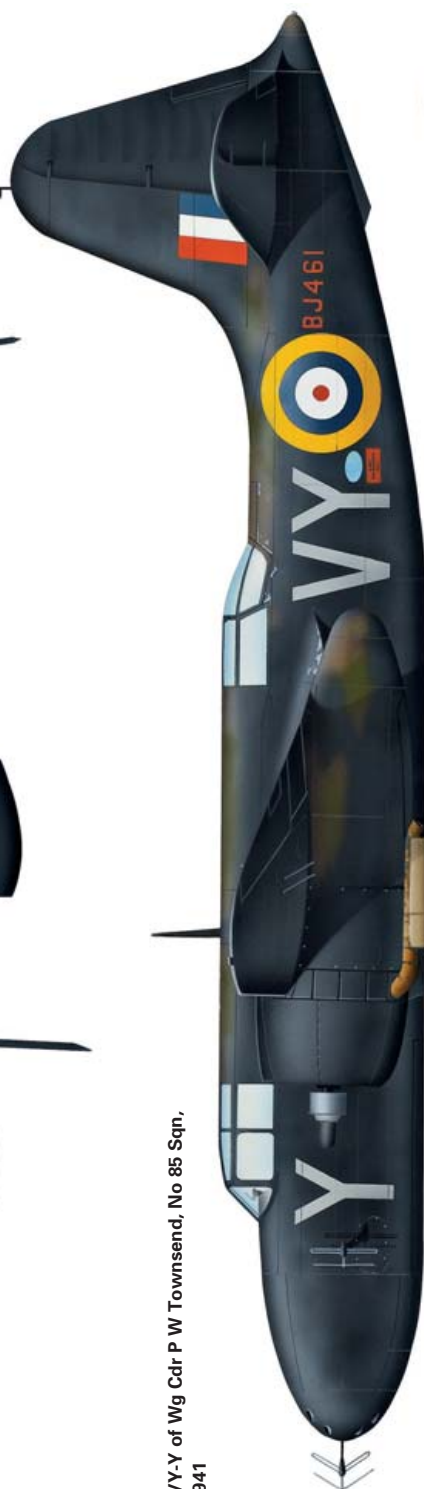
25

Defiant I N1770/JT-U of Flt Lt E C Deanesly, No 256 Sqn, Squires Gate, 10 April 1941



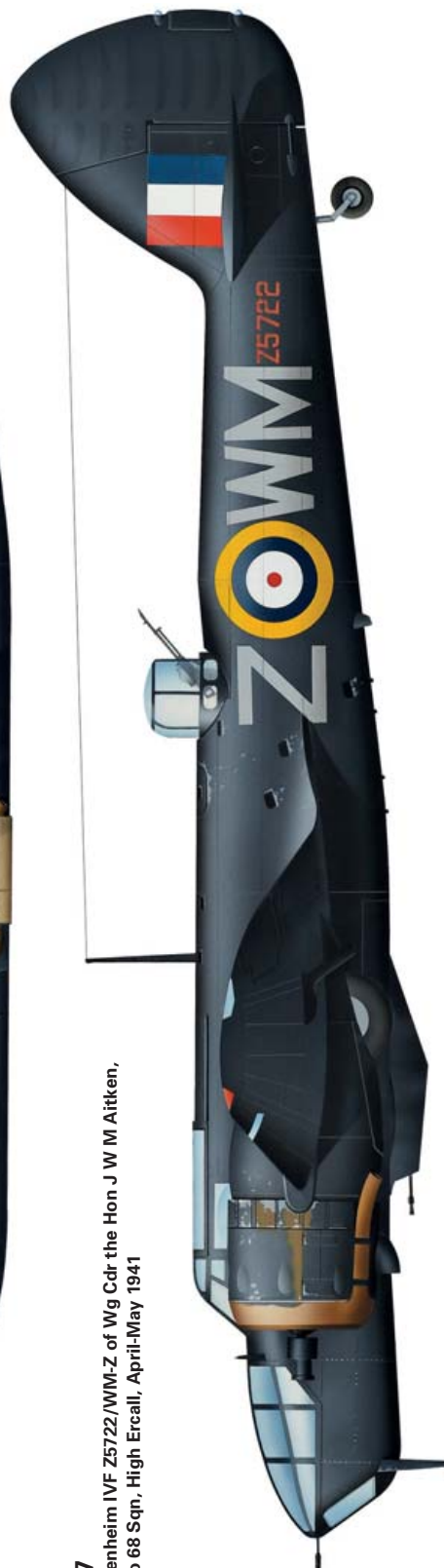
26

Havoc I BJ461/VY-Y of Wg Cdr P W Townsend, No 85 Sqn, Debden, April 1941



27

Blenheim IVF Z5722/WM-Z of Wg Cdr the Hon J W M Aitken, No 68 Sqn, High Ercall, April-May 1941



28

Havoc I BT465/HN-F of Flt Lt P L Burke, No 93 Sqn, Middle Wallop, April-May 1941



29

Havoc I BD121/YP-F of Flt Off P S B Ensor, No 23 Sqn, Ford, May 1941



30

Defiant I T3937/KP-S of Plt Off N S Head, No 409 Sqn RCAF, Coleby Grange, July to September 1941



31

Defiant I V1123/RA-R of Plt Off R G Woodman, No 410 Sqn
RCAF, Drem, August-September 1941



32

Havoc I BD112/YP-T of Sqn Ldr B R O'B Hoare, No 23 Sqn,
Ford, October 1941



33

Defiant I N1636/VA-M of Plt Off G E Jameson RNZAF, No 125
'Newfoundland' Sqn, Fairwood Common, 18 January 1942

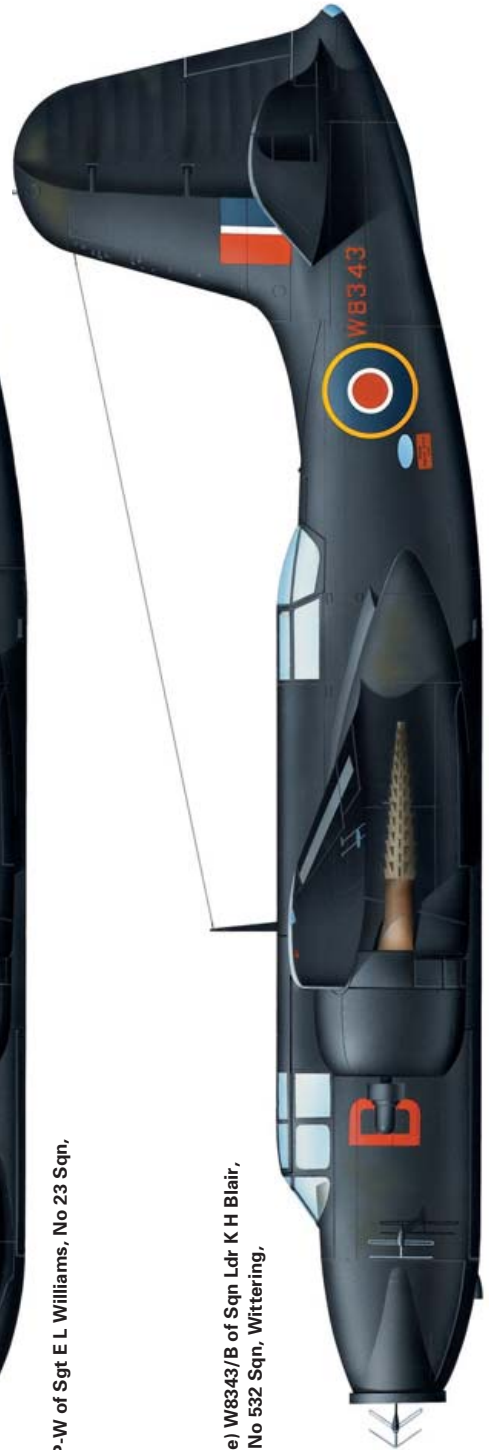




34
Defiant II AA583/ZJ-M of Sqn Ldr R C
Haine, No 96 Sqn, Wrexham, April to
June 1942



35
Boston III (AL459/YP-W of Sgt E L Williams, No 23 Sqn,
Ford, June 1942



36
Boston III (Turbine) W8343/B of Sqn Ldr K H Blair,
No 1453 Flight and No 532 Sqn, Wittering,
September 1942

He 111 of III./KG 26 in the circuit at Poix and shot it down in flames. Among the unit's other successes was the destruction of two more bombers near Lille airfield during a long running fight on the night of 25 February, while on 3 March Ensor downed another He 111 at Merville. Five nights later, on the 8th, Alan Gawith's crew had an eventful sortie over Beauvais;

'We found the whole area brilliantly lit up with flare-path lights, landing lights and takeoff lights. I saw an aircraft circuiting the aerodrome, and although I gave chase at full boost I was unable to catch it until we had completed four or five circuits and the enemy aircraft had begun to lower its undercarriage. I then opened fire, continuing down to point blank range. We narrowly averted a collision, our Blenheim passing just above the enemy aircraft, which emitted a sizeable explosion.'

One of No 23 Sqn's flight commanders at this time was Sqn Ldr E J 'Jumbo' Gracie, a Battle of Britain Hurricane ace who made his only Blenheim claim over Merville on 14/15 March. He had followed a bomber home as it returned from a raid, later recalling;

'As it turned into the moon it was plainly seen to be a Do 17 or 215, and with a very good view of the target we opened fire from the port quarter, aiming at the cockpit from 75-50 yards. As we passed from port to starboard a large flare came from the starboard engine. The enemy aircraft banked vertically to port and went into a violent sideslip and disappeared from sight.'

Although Gracie was only credited with a probable victory, this attack undoubtedly added to the unsettling effect that No 23 Sqn's intruders were having on the tired Luftwaffe bomber crews returning from long night missions over Britain.

Although the Blenheim IF's days with No 23 Sqn were by now numbered, it was in just such an aircraft that future ace Flt Lt Bertie Hoare made his first claims – a probable over Lille Nord on 3/4 April and a victory over a four-engined aircraft (probably a Fw 200 Condor) on 21/22 April near St Leger airfield. On the latter occasion he had spotted two aircraft near the airfield and attacked the second, as described in the Fighter Command report on the incident;

'Flt Lt Hoare got onto the tail of the second aircraft and closed in from 50 yards astern and below, firing a short burst into the belly of the enemy aircraft, which was probably a Focke-Wulf Condor transport. The enemy aircraft gave an enormous flash and fell to bits in the air, bursting into flames as it did so. Fragments flew past the Blenheim on all sides. Burning pieces were strewn over a wide area on the ground, and flames were still seen from about 30 miles away. The air was filled with debris, and after landing the crew discovered one large piece of armour plating, nearly three feet square, sticking out of the leading edge of one of the wings!'

This success proved to be No 23 Sqn's swansong with the Blenheim IF, as on 7 April the unit CO, Wg Cdr G F W Heycock, flew a Havoc I mission over France and Sgt J B Raffels performed its final Blenheim sortie a month later on 6 May.

COUNTERING THE *BLITZ*

By the turn of the year the existing Blenheim nightfighter units had all but re-equipped with the more effective Beaufighter, with No 29 Sqn



One of No 23 Sqn's leading intruder pilots was Flg Off Philip Ensor, who achieved all of his 11 claims – including five confirmed victories – flying either the Blenheim or Havoc. He was killed along with his crew on an intruder mission to Lannion airfield, in France, on 7/8 September 1941 (No 23 Sqn archives)



When first formed, No 68 Sqn was equipped with both Blenheim IFs and IVFs. One of the latter was Z5722/WM-L, and this aircraft was adopted by the CO, Wg Cdr the Hon Max Aitken. Among the other notable pilots to fly this fighter were future aces Plt Off Mervyn Shippard and Flt Lt Dickie Haine. Based in the northwest, No 68 Sqn was soon re-equipped with Beaufighters (via J D R Rawlings)

flying its last sortie with the older Bristol 'twin' on 10 February 1941. By then No 68 Sqn had formed with Blenheim nightfighters at Catterick under the command of eight-victory ace Wg Cdr the Hon Max Aitken. Mainly equipped with the Mk IF, the unit also had at least one all-black Mk IVF on strength that the CO claimed as his own! Also forming with a Battle of Britain ace as CO was No 96 Sqn, led by Sqn Ldr Ronald Kellett. The unit had been created when Hurricane-equipped No 422 Flight had been redesignated at Cranage. No 96 Sqn had received its first Defiant in March 1941, although deliveries were slow. A number of notable future aces arrived too in the shape of Flt Lt Gordon Raphael

and Flg Offs Victor Verity and Paul Rabone, while 16-victory ace Flt Lt James 'Sandy' Sanders became a flight commander, commenting to the author;

'The Defiant was a bit underpowered, and although it looked like a Hurricane, the weight of the four-gun turret reduced its manoeuvrability and speed – plus it used to bounce on landing on Cranage's grass! Nonetheless, it did give sterling service as a nightfighter.'

Sanders' CO was unimpressed with Cranage, and he made strenuous efforts to have all-weather concrete runways laid.

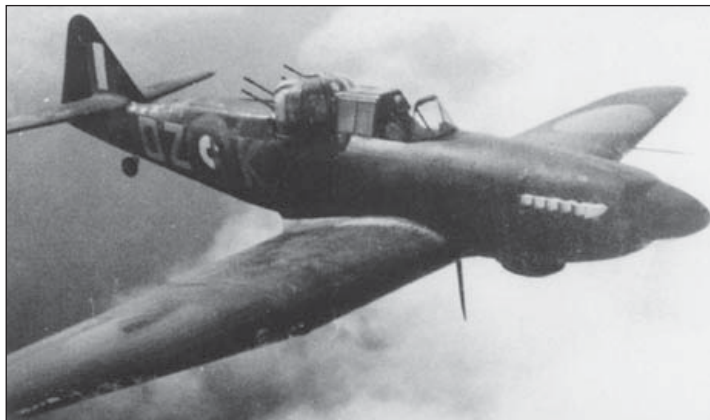
Two other Hurricane squadrons that had been switched to nightfighting also began receiving Defiants at the start of 1941, although No 151 Sqn at Wittering would fly both types until 1942. In contrast, although Debden-based No 85 Sqn took delivery of its first Defiant on 2 January, the type was withdrawn the following month following just three operational



Another of the newly equipped Defiant units that appeared in early 1941 was Cranage-based No 96 Sqn, to which T3954/ZJ-K belonged. It is seen here whilst being flown by Czech pilot Flg Off Klobouznik (Zdenek Hurt)

During early 1941 No 96 Sqn had a number of future aces on its strength, including Flg Off Paul Rabone (left), who had been shot down in a Battle light bomber in May 1940 and then escaped from behind enemy lines (author's collection)





sorties. The unit then started its conversion to Havoc Is instead.

No 151 Sqn also contained a number of future aces, including Flt Lt Des McMullen, already with 16 victories to his name, and Sgt Henry Bodien. Perhaps the most remarkable new arrival was, however, air gunner Plt Off Sydney Carlin. A ten-victory SE 5a ace from World War 1, he had originally served in the trenches, being decorated with the MC and DCM. Having been wounded and lost a leg, Carlin transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in 1917. It was here that he was nicknamed 'Timbertoes' because of his wooden leg! Awarded the DFC in 1918, Carlin had farmed in Kenya post-war until returning to the UK to enlist following the outbreak of World War 2. Despite being 50 years old, and with only one leg, he managed to talk his way back into the RAF as aircrew.



The year opened with raids on Liverpool, Bristol and Cardiff, and having been declared operational on 5 January, No 255 Sqn flew its first patrols on the 9th. The following night Flt Lt Richard Trousdale was over the Humber estuary when he sighted an He 111, possibly inbound to Manchester, and his gunner fired three bursts before it dived steeply away. He too soon discovered the frustrations of the Defiant as a nightfighter when, on a subsequent sortie, Trousdale glimpsed a Dornier bomber but his VHF radio and lights then packed up near Withernsea. For a non-radar equipped aircraft such as the Defiant, the long winter nights, often accompanied by poor weather, led to a lean time in terms of aerial victories.

However, in an effort to back up the excellent work being done by Beaufighter IF nightfighters, at Debden No 85 Sqn, under the command of Hurricane ace Wg Cdr Peter Townsend, received its first Havoc I fitted with AI radar and an eight-gun nose on 15 February, with several more following over the next week. To aid conversion, the unit used an

In early 1941 Wittering-based No 151 Sqn was switched to nightfighter work, receiving Defiants to fly alongside its Hurricanes. The unit successfully flew both types until receiving Mosquitoes in 1942. Among its Defiants was this machine, N1791/DZ-K (*Ron Durand*)

One of No 151 Sqn's successful Defiant pilots was Flt Lt Des McMullen, who in the spring of 1941 shot down three He 111s to add to the 17 victories he had claimed the previous year flying Spitfires with Nos 54 and 222 Sqns (*P H T Green Collection*)

One of McMullen's regular gunners was Plt Off Sydney Carlin, a 10-victory ace in his own right from World War 1 – a feat that he achieved despite having lost a leg in the trenches! Awarded the MC, DCM and DFC for his exploits, Carlin was also the most highly decorated member of No 151 Sqn at that time! (*P H T Green Collection*)





Parked at Kirton-in-Lindsey in early 1941 for the defence of the Midlands and the north of England, Defiant I N3340/YD-D was assigned to No 255 Sqn. This unit made its first claims on 10 February 1941 when Flt Lts Trousdale and Hall both probably destroyed He 111s off the east coast (No 255 Sqn records)

to climb violently, stall and then spin in, killing all three aboard the machine – fellow ace Plt Off W H Hodgson was one of those to perish.

Although engagements were few, the newly re-equipped Defiant units did soon begin scoring, No 151 Sqn's Sgt Henry Bodien opening his account on the night of 4 February when he flew past Do 17Z 'U5+AR' of 7./KG 2 that was targeting Derby;

'I turned after him and delivered an attack from slightly below and from the starboard beam. He broke away upwards and to the left, and I followed round. He returned to straight and level and I delivered a second attack from just below and by his starboard wingtip – the enemy aircraft turned gently away and was burning slightly in the belly. Its turn tightened up to a steep spiral, which it continued until it hit the ground and exploded.'

The AOC No 11 Group sent the following telegram to No 151 Sqn; 'Congratulations on your success last night. Glad to observe that the squadron is efficient on any type of aircraft.'

On 10 February, during raids on Humber-side and the northwest, No 255 Sqn saw action when Richard Trousdale made his first Defiant claim by probably destroying an He 111. He noted the bomber's evasive tactics in his Combat Report;

'The enemy aircraft immediately headed towards me in a steep diving turn and I was unable to remain in formation with him, having to slide over the top of the enemy aircraft. This action prevented my gunner from firing and gave his top gunner a chance. The enemy aircraft used these tactics on two occasions.'

A second probable was claimed by Flt Lt Hall.

Flg Off 'Gill' Hayton, who was soon to become very successful over Malta, flew his first operational patrol with No 255 Sqn a short while later, while 'Sandy' Sanders arrived in the squadron to command 'A' Flight at the same time. Early February also saw the arrival of future ace Flt Lt Christopher Deanesly in No 256 Sqn as the 'B' Flight commander. His comments, related to the author, echoed those of other pilots serving with the squadron at this time;

'I was a flight commander and later CO of No 256 Sqn, joining the unit in early February 1941 and remaining with it until April 1942. While the Defiant had been a near disaster as a day fighter, its reputation as a nightfighter, for which it had considerable advantages, certainly compensated for its earlier failures. In this period the squadron had considerable successes. The valuable feature of "two pairs of eyes", supported by the power turret, which was able to fire upwards with

impressed GAL Cygnet to give pilots experience in how to use a tricycle undercarriage. Among those who converted was high-scoring ace Flt Lt Sammy Allard, although he perished on 13 March when a gun inspection panel detached and jammed the rudder of his Havoc I as it lifted off from Kirton-in-Lindsey on a routine ferry flight. The jammed rudder caused the aircraft

direct impact, made the Defiant far more effective. The aircraft was also easier to fly on instruments.'

BATTLES IN THE DARKNESS

On the night of 12/13 March the enemy launched a major attack on Liverpool when more than 300 aircraft were despatched. That night there was a full moon and little cloud – conditions that greatly improved the chances of the Defiant units intercepting Luftwaffe bombers. Flg Off V Vesely, a Czech serving with No 96 Sqn, found an He 111 but the guns in Sgt Heycock's turret failed to fire. The crew soon sorted that problem out, only for their Defiant (N1803) to be hit by return fire that wounded Vesely in the chest.

No 264 Sqn, flying from Biggin Hill, enjoyed better luck. Firstly, Flg Off Desmond Hughes (in N1801) spotted an He 111 over Dorking and was able to claim his fourth victory;

'The enemy aircraft was engaged from about 50 yards from this position with a series of one-second bursts. The first burst started a small fire in the starboard engine, whilst the next two bursts set the engine thoroughly on fire. Sgt Gash transferred his attention to the cabin and fired several more bursts, the de Wilde ammunition being seen to burst inside the cabin, which forthwith filled with flames. The bandit then fell off in a left hand spiral dive and plunged to earth, where the bomb load exploded.'

The pilot of the He 111, Stabsfeldwebel Karl Bruning of 5./KG 55, was the only survivor. He later recalled, 'All hell was let loose. Both engines were hit – they stopped at once'. Bailing out, he noted 'below me I saw my aeroplane spiralling earthwards in flames'. An hour later Flg Off Terry Welsh, with gunner Sgt Lawrence Hayden – both veterans from the 1940 fighting – were also over Surrey, as Welsh described;

'I was vectored after an enemy aircraft and, continuing my dive, I came up alongside it at about 40 yards range. My gunner and I immediately saw it to be an He 111. I did a cross-over attack (i.e. curving round the nose of the bomber) from beneath and Sgt Hayden opened fire at 25 yards. The de Wilde ammunition could be seen bursting inside the cabin and the pilot was probably killed immediately, as when I pulled into a steep turn to attack from the port side I saw the enemy aircraft in a vertical dive. Smoke and sparks were coming from it, and I saw the enemy aircraft plunge into the sea.'

His victim, from Pathfinder unit III./KG 26, crashed into the sea 15 miles south of Hastings. It was Terence Welsh's seventh, and final, victory – and the only one he claimed at night.

That same night, further north in Lincolnshire, Flt Lt 'Sandy' Sanders saw his first action in a Defiant from Kirton-in-Lindsey, as he recounted to the author;

'I took off [in N1765 – author] at about midnight and climbed

Defiant nightfighter N1801/PS-Y was the regular mount of Plt Off Desmond Hughes and gunner Sgt Fred Gash during the night Blitz. On 12 March 1941 they used the aircraft to down an He 111 from 2./KG 55 near Dorking. They probably destroyed another Heinkel on 8 April, and two nights later they shot down an He 111 from KGr 100 off the Isle of Wight, giving Hughes ace status (D Oliver)





The commander of No 255 Sqn's 'B' Flight in the spring of 1941 was 16-victory ace Flt Lt 'Sandy' Sanders, who had two frustrating combats in the Defiant that resulted in him being credited with an He 111 probably destroyed and a Ju 88 damaged (J G Sanders)

quickly overhead base, and within a few minutes I had sighted a bomber astern and just above me, flying on an easterly course. I looked closely and I put the Defiant into a steep turn towards it, believing that it was a Dornier. I do recall informing my gunner about the contact, but he unfortunately could not see the thing, although it was plainly visible to me and was only about 100 ft above us – almost a sitting duck! However, it soon outpaced us and disappeared, much to my frustration.

'About half-an-hour later we were vectored down towards Retford at about 15,000 ft, and I soon spotted a Heinkel about two miles away and a little above us. We were nicely positioned, so I was able to slip into a good position to give the gunner a beam shot – and again the blighter just could not see the thing! I then closed right in – it must only have been about 100 ft away – and at last he managed to open fire with about half-a-dozen short bursts. We got a little fire in return, so I fell slightly behind and below the He 111 – one of the few advantages of having a gun turret!

'Very soon afterwards we spotted an explosion underneath the central part of the bomber's undersides, and I could see the incendiary bullets hitting it, which proved quite useful in helping me to maintain my position. Thereafter, black smoke began to pour from one of the engines, and the bomber swung around to head back the way it had come. I can recall quite vividly the long line of smoke right across the sky as it droned on quite slowly, all the while descending with small goutts of flame shooting out from one of the wings. The gunner had told me that his turret – or maybe it was his guns – were out of action, so I came home, having last seen the Heinkel somewhere over Lincoln.'

Sanders was credited with a probable, and although his logbook for the period was later lost, he remained convinced that the bomber would not have got home. His victim was possibly the He 111 of III./KG 26 that force-landed in Amiens after being shot up by a nightfighter.

That same night, after intensive training, the Poles in No 307 Sqn also made their combat debut from Squires Gate, near Blackpool, when Sgts Franciszek Janowiak and Jerzy Karais attacked an He 111 over Ruthin and were credited with a probable, Janowiak recalling:

'I warned my air gunner and dived to 150 ft below the He 111 and 50 yards from his right side. The air gunner gave a burst of about three seconds. Simultaneously, the lower rear gunner of the enemy aircraft returned fire with a short burst, but he failed to hit the Defiant. I saw the bullets fired by my air gunner entering the fuselage of the enemy aircraft. I consider that the He 111 was damaged.'

Then, just after midnight on 15 March, fellow No 307 Sqn pilot Flg Off Leandowski damaged another Heinkel near Formby. It was a start, and ten days later No 307 Sqn moved to Colerne. That night Janowiak with Sgt Lipinski intercepted an He 111 over Bristol and brought it down near Sherborne, thus giving the unit its first confirmed victory.

After an extended work up period No 256 Sqn, also based at Squires Gate, finally became operational on 1 April when Flt Lt Deanesly flew the unit's first patrol over Merseyside. One week later, on the day that No 85 Sqn became operational on Havoc Is, the Luftwaffe attacked both Greenock and Liverpool, the latter city being that night's alternative target. Among the bombers heading for Liverpool was Ju 88 'B3+JN' of II./KG 54, which 20-year-old Flt Lt Donal West (in N3445) shot down

to break No 256 Sqn's duck. Also airborne on 7/8 April was James Sanders (in N1617) of No 255 Sqn;

'I can recall my final air combat quite vividly, as again it proved to be a very frustrating affair. Sent to patrol over the Humber area, I spotted an aircraft as soon as I took off, which was quickly confirmed by ground control as hostile. It was off to my left and perhaps 1000 ft above me. The gunner called that he thought it was a Ju 88, and at about 300 yards he opened fire. I kept low and closed in, allowing him to fire directly up into the bomber's belly. The aircraft was all black, and we kept hitting it without apparent effect until it went into cloud, and that was that.'

The following night, when Coventry was again the target, the Defiants of Nos 151 and 264 Sqs hit a purple patch, claiming no fewer than six He 111s destroyed. One fell to the CO of No 264 Sqn, Sqn Ldr Arthur 'Scruffy' Sanders, who brought down '1H+ET' of 9./KG 26 near Hitchin to claim his first victory. The Heinkel's pilot, Leutnant Julius Tengler, survived, subsequently recalling;

'Suddenly we were surprised by a burst of gunfire from behind, which smashed the windows of the cockpit and wrecked one engine – I think it was the port one. Immediately the starboard engine caught fire.'

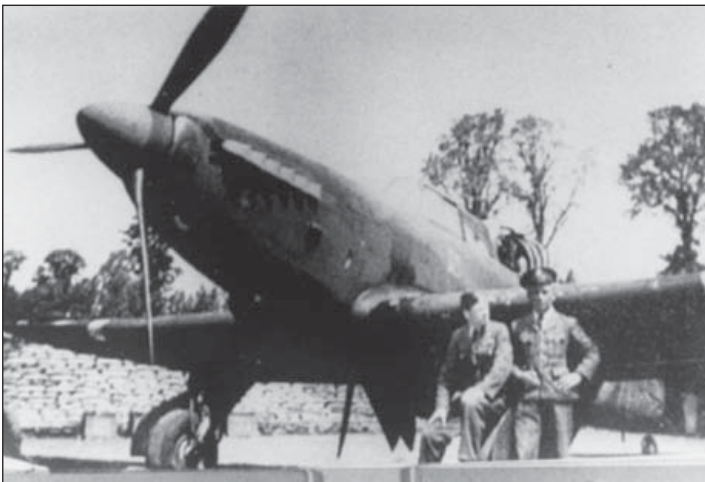
Near to the target area, No 151 Sqn's Flt Lt Des McMullen (who was a Spitfire ace from the Battle of Britain) and gunner Sgt Fairweather claimed their first Defiant victory when they shot down an aircraft of 3./KG 55. Shortly after 0100 hrs on the 9th, fellow No 151 Sqn pilot Sgt Alan Wagner took off from Wittering. The unit record book described the first of his nine victories as follows;

'East of Coventry at about 0140 hrs, an He 111 was sighted at the same height as Sgt Wagner's Defiant, and he closed in to 40 yards. His air gunner opened fire from a position under the port wing, and flames were observed in the cockpit and fuselage of the enemy aircraft. It was last seen diving through the cloud layer with smoke pouring out.'

'Continuing the patrol, another He 111 was then seen about ten minutes later 20 miles south of Coventry. The Defiant closed in to ten yards, and three long bursts were fired into the enemy aircraft from the under port wing position. Explosive ammunition was seen striking the fuselage but there was no return fire and no evasive action was taken. It appeared as though the crew had been killed.'

Remarkably, the turret on Wagner's Defiant had jammed pointing to one side, so it had had to be fired from a fixed position! He and his unnamed gunner were credited with an He 111 destroyed – probably that of Oberfeldwebel Heinz Sollner of 3./KG 55, which came down near Desford, in Leicestershire – and a second Heinkel as a probable.

In the improving weather, and with the increased intensity of the raids, the Defiant units were presented with further opportunities for



No 307 Sqn was the only Polish nightfighter unit, and it was initially equipped with Defiants. Stood in front of N3437/EW-K at Exeter in 1941 are Sgts Franciszek Janowiak and Jerzy Karais, who, on the night of 25/26 March, shot down an He 111 near Sherborne to claim the squadron's first victory (*M W Payne*)

success. On the night of 9/10 April Birmingham was targeted, and once again Flt Lt McMullen and his gunner, Sgt Fairweather, were successful, as No 151 Sqn's record book recorded;

'He was circling fires when the gunner saw an He 111 below and 400 yards ahead. Closing to point blank range, the gunner fired a three-second burst from below. The Defiant slightly overshot, and the enemy aircraft took evasive action by means of climbing and diving turns, but further attacks were made from the port side below and the port engine caught fire. The fire spread rapidly and the enemy aircraft attempted to ram the Defiant. A final burst was fired from the port bow and the enemy aircraft crashed slightly west of Bramcote.'

Also airborne was Sgt Henry Bodien, flying with Sgt Jonas, who claimed his second victory (an He 111), although not without drama, as the diary showed;

'Bodien, after claiming his victory, dived into the balloon barrage, and Jonas, thinking the pilot was dead, bailed out'

More significantly, that night also saw No 85 Sqn's Havoc Is make their combat debut when Wg Cdr Peter Townsend probably destroyed a Ju 88. Plt Off Geoff Howitt went one better, however, as he was credited with the first of his six victories – and the first for the Havoc I – that same night. Flying with Sgt Reed, he engaged an He 111 over the sea 15 miles east of Dunwich, as the record book stated;

'Flying at 9000 ft, Plt Off Howitt made three separate attacks on the enemy aircraft and saw his bullets striking. Flaming pieces from the aircraft flew past him during the second attack. It was later confirmed as destroyed, having been seen to crash into the sea.'

Wg Cdr Townsend was in action again the following night;

'Gave "Tally Ho!" and after a five-minute chase on AI sighted bandit above and in front at about 300 yards. Was overshooting so did S-turns to avoid, and also throttled back violently. Closed in slowly from below and astern, and at 100 yards gave a three-second burst. Target obscured by flashes, so held fire and broke away below. Got in below again and closed for another attack. At approximately 150-200 yards experienced intense and accurate return fire.'

After one more attack the Ju 88 disappeared, so Townsend could only claim a damaged in his final air combat.

UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS

The night of 9/10 April also saw another future ace make a claim in a less conventional manner. No 93 Sqn had been formed at Middle Wallop in December 1940 and equipped with obsolescent Harrow II bombers (and some Havoc Is), which it was to use to develop the concept of laying a field of mines suspended by parachutes ahead of a bomber stream. In this manner Flt Lt Pat Burke had been credited with a victory on 22/23 December 1940 to begin his path to aceship. No 93 Sqn continued with its minelaying concept into 1941, although by April it had largely re-equipped with Havoc Is. And it was in one of these (BT465) on the night of 9/10 April that, under the control of the Sturminster Marshal ground control intercept (GCI) station, Burke fired his mines in an irregular pattern to the southeast of Portland Bill, into which an He 111 may have flown, and he was credited with a probable.



That same night No 264 Sqn had found success using more conventional means against German bombers as they droned north towards their principal target, Birmingham. Over Surrey at 2350 hrs, Flt Sgt Ted Thorn and Sgt Fred Barker were vectored onto an intruder. Thorn closed to within 100 yards of the aircraft on its starboard side and identified the contact as a Heinkel – it was He111P-2 wk-nr 1423 'G1+DN' of 5./KG 55, flown by Unteroffizier Alfred Müller. Ted Thorn recalled;

'Closing in on the target, we made a beam attack with a burst of two seconds. We then crossed under the port side and gave another good burst of two seconds, and the port engine was seen to glow. Coming over the top of him, we fired a burst at the pilot. Returning to the port side, we gave him another burst into the fuselage, and we followed the enemy down to 9000 ft, at which point it disappeared into cloud in a steep dive with lots of white smoke coming from it'.

Descending in a steep dive, the He 111 had been lost by the Defiant crew in cloud over Brooklands. The bomber crashed a short while later in the estate of Lady Brunton, near Godalming. This was the last victory

One of the more bizarre concepts for nightfighting was that of aerial minelaying – a mission that No 93 Sqn was specifically established to perform in December 1940. Initially flying Harrow IIs, by early 1941 the unit (formerly No 420 Flight) was mainly equipped with modified Havoc Is like BT465/HN-F. Named *FRANCES*, it was used by future ace Flt Lt Pat Burke on 9 April to lay a minefield that resulted in him being credited with probably destroying an He 111. At month-end Flt Lt George MacLannahan used BT465 to destroy a Heinkel (*W Huntley*)

The remains of He 111P 'G1+DN' of 5./KG 55 are examined where the bomber fell at Burbridge, near Godalming, on 9 April 1941 – the final victory of Flt Sgt Ted Thorn and Sgt Fred Barker (*John Castle*)



claimed by Ted Thorn and Fred Barker, and it made them the most successful Defiant pilot and air gunner of the war, respectively.

The following night No 93 Sqn's Flt Lt Dennis Hayley-Bell (who had claimed a kill with a mine from a Harrow II in March) was credited with a probable after sowing mines with Havoc I BB894 over the Channel. Flt Lt George MacLannahan, flying with Sgt Huntley, claimed another off the coast of Devon at the end of the month.

The Havoc was involved in yet another novel way to intercept and attack enemy bombers by night during 1941, the aircraft being seen as an ideal platform on which to mount an airborne searchlight. Designated as the Havoc (Turbinlite), the aircraft had a flat, glazed nose that contained a Helmore searchlight of 2700 million candlepower, the batteries for which were carried in the bomb-bay. Fitted with AI radar, but without armament, the aircraft had to be paired up with a Hurricane 'parasite' fighter. Having detected a target, the Havoc (Turbinlite) would then illuminate it for the fighter to engage. Clearly, it was an unwieldy system.

Over the Midlands (in N1771), No 256 Sqn's Flt Lt Christopher Deanesly achieved his first night victory by more conventional means, as he recounted to the author;

'Our first success against the enemy came on 10/11 April when we had a sudden deployment to Tern Hill (near Market Drayton) to meet an expected night attack on Birmingham. With New Zealander Sgt J Scott as my gunner, I found a formation of three Heinkel 111s in bright moonlight above cloud and easily set one on fire. Owing to radio failure and low cloud, the return to Tern Hill was hazardous, and the crew from another aircraft had to bail out. For the next month the pace quickened, and the squadron had several successes, but thereafter raids on the UK almost stopped as Hitler prepared for the German invasion of Russia.'

Deanesly's victim was He 111H-5 wk-nr 3623 '1H+FS' of 8./KG 26 that was targeting Coventry.

Flg Off Desmond Hughes and Sgt Fred Gash were patrolling off the Isle of Wight that same night, and they downed a 'Ju 88' (it was actually an He 111 of KGr 100) for their fifth Defiant victory – they had been credited with an He 111 probable southeast of Biggin

Hill two nights earlier. Their flight commander, Flt Lt Eric Barwell (in N3307), also had a successful night on 10/11 April, his gunner, Sgt Martin, shooting down an He 111 of III./KG 26 in the mid-evening, then, during a later sortie in the early hours of the 11th, they probably destroyed another Heinkel from I./KG 55. These were Barwell's final Defiant claims.

Although the defences were now inflicting increasing losses, the Luftwaffe's nocturnal bombing offensive continued through to the end of April and on into May.

The most successful Defiant crew was that of Flt Sgt Ted Thorn (left) and his gunner Sgt Fred Barker (right), the latter also being the RAF's most successful air gunner of World War 2 (Alec Brew)



BLITZ TO 'BAEDEKER'

Despite the advent of the shorter nights as the spring advanced, there was no apparent reduction in the raids. During April the Luftwaffe had launched more than 5000 night bombing sorties in 16 major raids against England, although the improved defences had taken a higher toll, with 58 bombers lost. The tempo continued into the early part of May, and with Merseyside and the port of Liverpool initially being the focus, so the Defiant units in the northwest saw action.

During the late evening of 3 May Flt Lt Christopher Deanesly of No 256 Sqn was patrolling over Liverpool when, in the glow of the flames against a thick haze, he spotted a Ju 88 that Sgt W J Scott fired at. The bomber, from *Gruppenstab II./KG 54*, disappeared from view into cloud and subsequently crashed in North Wales. Although then ordered to land, Deanesly chose to stay on patrol as visibility had improved. Shortly before midnight he spotted another raider that 'passed only a few feet over us, travelling in the opposite direction. This time we had not been noticed, and I dropped down below and astern in a short time.

'After the first burst, which hit the belly of the bomber, the aircraft dived very steeply, and we swerved from side to side. As the machine came into Sgt Scott's sights, he gave it a series of short but effective bursts. We were losing height very rapidly, and at 2000 ft I pulled out in conditions of thick haze. The enemy aircraft was then below us, and moments later there was a terrific flash as the bomber hit the ground.'

Deanesly and Scott had downed a Do 17, this latter victory taking the former's tally to five kills exactly. When commenting on these successes, Deanesly told the author that 'a fixed front gun fighter would have had no chance at all that night'.

Defiants from No 96 Sqn at Cranage were also up on the night of 3/4 May, including N1803 flown by Flg Off Victor Verity. He too was ordered to patrol over Liverpool, where he takes up the story of downing a Ju 88 to become an ace;

'While making a left hand circuit my gunner, Sgt F W Wake, shouted that there was a Hun below us on our port beam. I put the Defiant into a dive, banking the aircraft steeply as we closed. My gunner fired at the same time as I saw the enemy aircraft about 100 yards away. While it was still steeply banked, I distinctly saw the de Wilde incendiary rounds entering the top of the cockpit. I banked my Defiant over to starboard with

Flt Lt Christopher Deanesly (left) and his gunner, Sgt Jack Scott, pose on a No 256 Sqn Defiant towards the end of the Blitz. With four victories, Deanesly was the unit's most successful Defiant pilot, becoming an ace after the third of them – he had two shared victories from his time flying Spitfire Is with No 152 Sqn in 1940 (E C Deanesly)





By wearing a 'sharkmouth' marking, No 151 Sqn Defiant N3328/DZ-Z is thought to have been unique. Among the notable pilots that flew it during the *Blitz* were Battle of Britain ace WO James Hopewell and future ace Sgt Henry Bodien (via R L Ward)

Henry Bodien claimed all five of his victories serving with No 151 Sqn, the first three while flying Defiants (P H T Green Collection)

In the spring of 1941 Ford-based No 23 Sqn re-equipped with the Havoc I to continue its very effective intruder campaign over Luftwaffe bomber bases in northern France. Among the aircraft it received was BD112/YP-T (via J D Oughton)



night when he attacked an 'He 111' (actually a Ju 88 of I./KGr 806) over the Wash;

'A wide white trail emerged from the port motor, which was also out of action. The enemy aircraft lost height rapidly. Several more attacks were made and eventually no further opposition was experienced. More good hits were observed at 800 ft, and the enemy aircraft was seen by both pilot and gunner burning slightly in the sea.'

Further afield, No 23 Sqn, now firmly established with the Havoc at four locations along the south coast, was also busy on 3/4 May. Flg Off Philip Ensor, who had two Blenheim IF victories to his name, shot down



a Ju 88 and probably destroyed an He 111 over Le Bourget. Also there to catch the returning bombers was No 23 Sqn's Bertie Hoare, flying BD124. He too spotted a Ju 88, which he probably destroyed before dropping his bombs on the airfield. A short time later he saw some navigation lights;

'I then closed in to 150 yards and opened fire from astern and a little to starboard with a six-second burst that could be seen hitting the starboard engine and fuselage. I gradually closed in and came dead astern, putting another six-second burst into the port engine. The enemy aircraft now went into a steep side-slipping turn to starboard, and as we passed almost underneath him Sgt Fletcher put another short burst into him. Black smoke was pouring out of both of the aircraft's engines, which we had now identified as an He 111. I could not watch him go down because while we were engaging this enemy aircraft another one came up on our tail. We took violent evasive action and shook him off.'

Hoare was credited with the Heinkel as destroyed to mark the start of a busy few days for both the intruders and the defenders.

No 255 Sqn finally achieved its first confirmed victory when early on 5 May its CO, Sqn Ldr Roderick Smith, caught a Ju 88 over Donna Nook, on the Lincolnshire coast, and shot it down. He wrote afterwards;

‘By the light of the flames I saw two parachutes leave the enemy aircraft, which then went into a vertical dive and broke up into several burning parts before it hit the sea.’

His victim was ‘M2+EK’ of 2./KüFlGr 106, flown by Unteroffizier Hans Kramer and crew.

— LAST NIGHTS OF THE *BLITZ* —

Although not evident at the time, the *Blitz* was reaching its terrible crescendo, with Liverpool again being the primary target on the nights of 6/7 and 7/8 May. In the early hours of the 7th, No 96 Sqn’s Plt Off Victor Verity (again in N1803) and gunner Sgt F W Wake shot down an He 111 from 2./KG 53 near Morpeth, the aircraft being flown by Unteroffizier Rassloff. During interrogation, one of the crew told an RAF intelligence officer, ‘We were attacked by a Defiant in the area of Newcastle and repeatedly hit many times. We could not get away from him – the Defiant was very persistent!’

No 141 Sqn also enjoyed several successes that night, including two He 111s near Glasgow. About two hours after Verity’s successful combat Unteroffizier Hans Schaber’s Ju 88 of 5./KG 30 crash landed on Holy Island, having fallen victim to an attack by Flg Off Robert Day (in N1796) and his gunner, Plt Off F C A Lanning.

The next night, flying from Woodvale, No 256 Sqn enjoyed its best success to date when Flt Lt Deanesly and his gunner Sgt Scott downed He 111P-4 wk-nr 2971 ‘G1+LH’ of 1./KG 55, flown by Oberleutnant Adolf Knöringer, near Hazel Grove, Stockport. The bomber was engaged over Trafford Park, Scott’s accurate bursts setting its engines on fire so that the crew bailed out of the bomber and were taken prisoner. Deanesly recalled that they had fired from directly astern, and that the whole combat had lasted less than five minutes. It was his final claim.

This victory was just the start for the unit, however, for a second Heinkel from KG 55 (this time from 3 *Staffel*) was downed by Plt Off Don Toone and a third (from 6 *Staffel*) fell to Flg Off D R West near Queen’s Park, Wrexham. However, No 256 Sqn’s CO, Sqn Ldr G H Gatheral, having damaged a Ju 88 over St Helens, was hit by return fire and forced to bail out (of N3500) with his gunner, Flg Off D S Wallen.

From Cranage, No 96 Sqn aircraft were also launched in defence of the port city, and shortly before 0200 hrs on 8 May Verity and Wake stalked a Ju 88 (again in N1803), opening fire from less than 100 yards;



One of No 23 Sqn’s leading intruder pilots, and one of the RAF’s great characters, was Sqn Ldr Bertie Hoare, whose early victories were claimed with the Blenheim and Havoc. He commanded the squadron in 1942 (No 23 Sqn archives)

Local ARP wardens examine the remains of He 111P ‘G1+LH’ of 1./KG 55 after it had come down near Hazel Grove, Stockport, on the night of 8 May – Christopher Deanesly’s final victim. Oberleutnant Adolf Knöringer and his crew became PoWs (E C Deanesly)



'My air gunner opened up at the port engine for four seconds. I overshot for a moment, throttled back and Sgt Wake then gave the aircraft another four-second burst into the port engine. It went down and I gave chase, and soon observed black smoke issuing from the port engine. This grew in volume until the engine itself was in flames.'

The doomed Ju 88 – 'F1+AD' of KG 76 – was flown by Hauptmann von Zeihlburg, who perished with his crew. Verity then spotted another Ju 88 that promptly turned and attacked him! They assumed that it might have been a nightfighter, and a nocturnal dogfight ensued;

'Sgt Wake opened fire for three seconds and silenced the return fire. The enemy aircraft then went straight down, I am not sure whether on his back or not. During the period of diving Sgt Wake put a four-second burst into the port engine.'

Verity and Wake were credited with this Ju 88 as a probable.

To cap No 96 Sqn's finest hour with the Defiant, Sgt Taylor claimed an He 111 destroyed and a Dornier damaged.

The discomfort experienced by the *Kampfgruppen* that night continued once they were back over France thanks to the presence of RAF intruders. One such aircraft was the No 23 Sqn Havoc I flown by Flg Off Philip Ensor, which, near Vitry-Le Culot caught an He 111;

'I gave the enemy aircraft a two- or three-second burst from 100 yards into the port engine and fuselage. The port engine immediately caught fire. We gave him two more bursts from the same range and the whole fuselage seemed to glow. Having then lost our target, we continued circling the aerodrome again at about 400 ft until we saw a glow in the sky above us. We climbed up and saw the enemy aircraft again, giving it a further three bursts. The enemy aircraft then went into a steep dive, crashed into a wood northwest of the aerodrome and exploded.'

It was not all one-way traffic, however, for on the morning of the 8th a German intruder dropped a stick of bombs on Wittering, destroying two aircraft and mortally wounding No 151 Sqn's Sydney Carlin, who died the next day. His CO, Sqn Ldr Adams, noted in the unit's operational record book 'His loss is felt by all'.

The bombers sortied from France once again on the evening of 8 May and headed to various industrial targets, including Nottingham. Among those that rose to counter the raids was Flt Lt Richard Trousdale (in N3378) of No 255 Sqn;

'Over Hull I saw an He 111 below me at about 10,000 ft heading east. I dived down and closed to about 20 yards on his port side slightly below him. My gunner opened fire with a burst of about two seconds into the cockpit. The enemy aircraft then switched on its navigation lights, which it kept on until it crashed a few miles southeast of Leconfield. I saw no parachutes.

'Returning to Hull, I started another patrol at 14,000 ft and soon saw another He 111 silhouetted against the fires below. I dived and repeated exactly the tactics I had used in my previous attack, my gunner getting in two bursts. On the second attack I was blinded by a white flash from the centre section. The enemy aircraft's port engine caught fire and the bomber crashed a few miles out to sea.'

This rare 'double' gave the 20-year-old Trousdale ace status. In all, No 255 Sqn's Hurricane and Defiant crews made six claims that night.

No 264 Sqn's Defiant crews conducted a number of intruder sorties on 9/10 May, after which two enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed. One of these took the form of a Bf 110 downed near Merville airfield by veteran Defiant ace Flg Off Michael Young and his gunner Sgt L P Russell. This was Young's only night victory, and his final success in the Defiant.

The following night London was subjected to heavy night raids, with the Luftwaffe launching some 571 bomber sorties. The raids killed more than 1300 civilians and created a firestorm in the city's old historical centre. It was, however, the Luftwaffe's final major night bombing operation of the *Blitz* on London, and its heaviest.

From No 85 Sqn's new base at Hunsdon, in Hertfordshire, 26-year-old Canadian Flt Lt Gordon Raphael and his observer AC1 Nat Addison scrambled in a Havoc shortly before midnight and were vectored onto a contact north of London. Addison picked up the intruder on his AI radar and directed Raphael until the latter spotted the bomber visually, identifying it as an He 111;

'I fired one burst of four seconds at the starboard engine and the enemy aircraft immediately burst into flames and went into a left hand spiral dive to approximately 8000 ft, where it levelled out into a 60-degree dive and flew into the ground. It appeared to explode just before it hit the ground.'

He 111 '1T+HH' of I./KG 26 crashed near Chelmsford, killing Leutnant Kruger and his crew. Raphael and Addison had started on their path to becoming the most successful Havoc crew.



With seven and six shared victories, Flg Off Michael Young of No 264 Sqn was one of the most successful Defiant pilots. His only night victory, however, came during an intruder mission to Merville on 9 May when he shot down a Bf 110 (*Alec Brew*)

Defiant N3377/PS-J of No 264 Sqn, crewed by Flg Off Michael Young and gunner Sgt Les Russell, taxis out at the start of another sortie. It was in this aircraft that Young claimed his final victory over Merville (*Alec Brew*)



No 85 Sqn was the RAF's sole Havoc nightfighter unit, but the big Douglas 'twin' was used successfully by the squadron for more than 18 months. BJ461/VY-Y was one of the early Mk Is supplied to the squadron, its nose-mounted AI aerials being readily visible in this photograph. The aircraft was the regular mount of Plt Off Geoffrey Goodman, but it was also routinely flown throughout the summer of 1941 by future No 85 Sqn ace Plt Off Nigel Bunting (*P H T Green collection*)





Some of No 85 Sqn's Havoc crews pose at Hunsdon for a 'team shot'. Standing fifth from the left is Sqn Ldr Gordon Raphael, who was the sole Havoc ace. His radar operator, Sgt Nat Addison, is kneeling on the extreme right. Immediately to Raphael's right is Plt Off Nigel Bunting (No 85 Sqn Records)

illuminated both aircraft, which helped the Defiant. Two of the crew from the Ju 88 bailed out before the 3(F)/122 machine crashed in flames within five miles of Tunbridge Wells. Also successful was No 264 Sqn's CO, Sqn Ldr 'Scruffy' Sanders (and his gunner Plt Off Sutton), who brought down an He 111 near Wickham.

Again the intruders were out over France that night, with Philip Ensor spotting a Ju 88 near Beauvais;

'We immediately gave him three bursts from 100 yards astern and below, targeting his port engine and fuselage, both of which immediately caught fire. The enemy aircraft turned steeply to starboard and passed underneath us, following the line of flares that led to the runway in an attempt to force land, but the pilot failed and the bomber crashed into the wood upwind of the aerodrome.'

The Ju 88's destruction elevated Ensor to ace status, for he had previously claimed two victories with the Havoc I and two with the Blenheim IF.

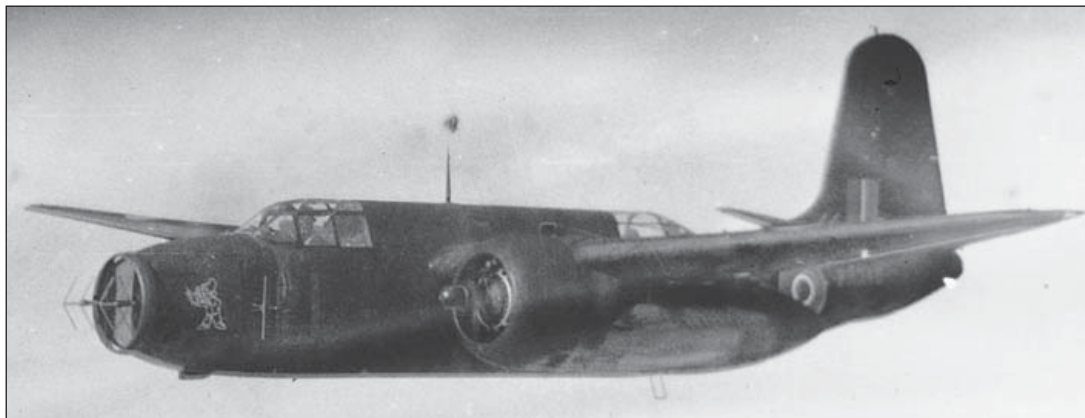
Within days of this success the Luftwaffe began moving many of its bomber units east for the invasion of Russia. The rapid decline of bomber operations on the Channel front meant that the prospects for both nightfighter and intruder crews significantly diminished. The transferring of most *Kampfgruppen* to the east did not, however, mark the end of air attacks on British cities. They were simply reduced in scale.

— LIGHTS IN THE SKY —

The Blenheim had largely passed from the nightfighter scene by now, although No 68 Sqn at High Ercall, in Shropshire, continued to fly them on operations through to May. Flt Lt Derek Pain, a future five-victory ace, carried out his first operational sortie on the 2nd, for example, but by June the squadron had fully transitioned onto the Beaufighter.

With trials completed, 22 May saw the formation at Hunsdon of No 1451 Flight as the first operational Turbinlite Havoc unit. The CO was Sqn Ldr Alan Gawith, who recalled;

'In July 1941 I was posted to Hunsdon to command No 1451 Flight, and it was my job to train pilots to fly Turbinlite aircraft. These machines featured a searchlight in the nose, a ton-and-a-half of batteries in the bomb-bay and a radar operator to direct the pilot. No 3 Sqn provided pilots with Hurricanes to shoot down the enemy.



'Imagine flying a Turbinlite Havoc on a dark night with a Hurricane tucked in under each wing and no lights anywhere, and suddenly a blacked out bomber looms up in front of you. A quick evasion action was not an option! After about three such episodes, added to the fact that my recruits were all pilots that other squadrons wanted rid of, I had had enough! Fortunately, the Hun had almost ceased bombing our cities by then.'

Each flight was paired with a Hurricane squadron for 'parasite fighter' duties, and nine more units were formed after No 1451 Flight over the next six months.

The No 93 Sqn minelayers also continued to be used occasionally during this period, with the CO, Wg Cdr M B Hamilton, dropping mines against a 'plot' on 28 May, but apparently without effect.

Two weeks earlier No 85 Sqn's burgeoning star team of Gordon Raphael and Nat Addison had had a successful night on 13/14 May when, over Shoeburyness, they attacked an He 111. It dived away, apparently out of control, and was claimed as a probable, although it would appear that '5J+KS' of 3./KG 100 did indeed ditch. The crew remained in the Gravesend area, and at about 0200 hrs Addison picked up another contact. He skilfully positioned the Havoc astern of the German bomber, allowing Raphael to fire a long burst into the unsuspecting He 111 ('1T+DL' of 3./KG 28), which fell away out of control and exploded in a great orange flash over the Isle of Grain.

Peter Townsend departed No 85 Sqn the following month, being replaced as CO by newly promoted Wg Cdr 'Scruffy' Sanders. June also saw the arrival of the first Havoc IIs at Hunsdon for No 85 Sqn, these aircraft being fitted with more powerful engines and eight Brownings in the nose. The unit had fully replaced its Havoc Is by November.

Still flying an original Mk I machine on the night of 23/24 June, Raphael and Addison shot down a Ju 88 (possibly from 2./KüFlGr 106) off Harwich shortly after midnight. However, their aircraft was subjected to intense and accurate return fire, one bullet grazing Addison's thigh, although he continued to direct his pilot onto the Junkers so facilitating its destruction. Addison received a DFM and Raphael a bar to his DFC for this sortie, during which their Havoc was hit 27 times. Nat Addison also received his long overdue promotion to sergeant. Another future ace was also in action with No 85 Sqn that night when, at 0145 hrs, near Bury St

Middle Wallop-based No 1458 Flight was commanded by ace Sqn Ldr Pat Burke, and it flew a mixed fleet of Havoc and Boston Turbinlites. One of the latter was W8346/J, which Burke may have flown on occasion. Note the Disney-inspired artwork on the aircraft's nose (W Huntley)

Edmunds, Plt Off Nigel Bunting attacked an He 111 that he was credited with as probably destroyed.

On 24/25 June the Luftwaffe went after targets in the Midlands, and off Flamborough Head in the early hours of the 25th Sgt Philip Kendall of No 255 Sqn began his path to acedom (in N3364);

'I obtained a visual, which I immediately identified as an He 111 approaching me on my port side, and I made a very tight turn and gave chase. Sgt Emeny opened fire, registering hits with his first burst. Almost immediately two of the crew bailed out, one from above and one from below the fuselage. The He 111 then took violent evasive action by diving and turning to port. I followed down to 8000 ft, whereupon he straightened out. I then approached him on the "dark side" and got him silhouetted against the northern light. I closed in and Sgt Emeny opened fire with long bursts. Flames shot out from beneath his starboard engine, whereupon the bomber dived vertically out of control, burning well.'

This success was almost the squadron's last hurrah with the Defiant, as within a few weeks it became non-operational and commenced re-equipment with Beaufighter IIs. No 141 Sqn had also begun its conversion to the Beaufighter IF by then. Other new units were still receiving Defiants, however, with No 125 Sqn forming at Colerne on 16 June and No 409 Sqn (the first RCAF nightfighter unit) at Digby the next day. Canadian-manned No 410 Sqn at Ayr and Australian No 456 Sqn at Valley also received Defiants at the end of the month. The latter was commanded by Sqn Ldr Gordon Olive, who had become a Spitfire ace with No 65 Sqn the previous year, whilst both of No 125 Sqn's flight commanders were Defiant aces in the form of Flt Lts Eric Barwell and Terry Welsh.

No 96 Sqn's Flg Off Victor Verity and his gunner Sgt F W Wake were successful again in the early hours of 8 July when the former claimed his penultimate victory;

'I sighted an He 111K approximately 800 yards south of us, heading west. The enemy aircraft had evidently sighted me first as he was taking evasive action in the form of an "S" as he headed for the clouds. I drew level with the aircraft on its starboard side. Sgt Wake gave the bomber a burst, which crashed into its cockpit. The Heinkel then turned into me, and Sgt Wake kept firing for approximately five seconds as the enemy aircraft crossed just ahead of us. There was a white flash from near the starboard engine, which lit up my cockpit. A minute or so after we had engaged the He 111 there was a dull orange flash beneath us.'



Defiant T3937/KP-S of No 409 Sqn at Coleby Grange soon after the unit had been formed. In the brief period that the Canadian squadron was equipped with the Boulton Paul fighter, T3937 was regularly flown by Plt Off Norman Head, who as well as later achieving four victories also became a V1 ace (D M Dixon)

Armourers replenish the turret of a Defiant of No 125 Sqn in preparation for another night defence sortie. This unit was one of a number of newly formed squadrons that received the Defiant during 1941 (J Surman)



In Scotland, the Canadians of No 410 Sqn mounted their first Defiant patrol on 23 July, their countrymen in No 409 Sqn conducting their first operations in early August. The latter unit's first encounter with the Luftwaffe saw one of its Defiants targeted by an intruder, rather than the other way round! Plt Off Norman Head (a future V1 ace who would also gain four aerial victories) noted in his logbook that he was attacked near Coleby Grange on the night of 18 August by a Ju 88 intruder. Two nights later he was again attacked when taking off. Declared operational that day, No 409 Sqn received its first Beaufighter IIFs at the end of August.

In Anglesey No 456 Sqn also became operational in August 1941, with one of its first patrols being flown by Flt Lt Charles Cooke. He was to take command of No 264 Sqn later in the year and achieve aceship with the unit when claiming its first victory after converting to the Mosquito II in May 1942.

A GRADUAL ECLIPSE

The early summer of 1941 saw the final replacement of the Blenheim in the nightfighter role and the start of the replacement of the Defiant as well. The only Havoc nightfighters still in the frontline were those being flown by No 85 Sqn, and they continued to make a valuable contribution. Indeed, one night in mid July two of the unit's rising stars were successful once more. On the night of 13/14 July Flg Off Geoff Howitt achieved his second victory by shooting down an He 111 off Shoburyness. He left the squadron for a tour as an instructor soon afterwards, but returned to the unit the following spring.

Also up that night under the direction of the Waldingfield GCI site was Gordon Raphael, once again with Nat Addison, who positioned the Havoc on AI close astern a violently manoeuvring Ju 88 (which the crew misidentified as an He 111). Raphael held his fire to 50 yards, at which point he began firing short bursts into the starboard engine. He continued firing, this time into the fuselage, until the bomber caught fire and dived away to crash into the sea.

Occasional engagements continued, and another Ju 88 fell to No 85 Sqn in August when Sgts Sullivan and Skeel shot down Leutnant Ernst Freidrich's Ju 88A-4 'B3+SP' of 6./KG 54 near Burnham-on-Crouch. Then, on the night of 16/17 September, the newly promoted Sqn Ldr Raphael, once more flying with Addison in one of the more powerful Havoc IIs, was scrambled by the North Weald controller, Sqn Ldr Stammers, shortly before 2130 hrs. Addison soon established radar contact at 10,000 ft, and a 15-minute chase began with what turned out to be a Ju 88C intruder from 1./NJG 2. Eventually, Raphael approached the wildly manoeuvring target, reporting afterwards;

'I closed to under 100 yards and fired a 1½-second burst, which caused the enemy aircraft to catch fire and plunge into the sea just off Clacton. As it fell in flames the enemy aircraft was illuminated by searchlights and identified as a Ju 88. Three members of the crew bailed out and were held at Clacton.'

The destruction of Oberfeldwebel Viel's aircraft made Gordon Raphael an ace, and he was the only pilot to claim that distinction in a Havoc. In a press interview at the time he praised Nat Addison;

'It wasn't really my doing, you know. That young radio operator of mine has been responsible for our getting each one of them.'

Although the level of Luftwaffe bomber activity over France had markedly reduced since mid June, No 23 Sqn's intruders were out most nights. Despite there being few combats, Bertie Hoare added to his tally on 13/14 September when, over Beauvais, he shot down an He 111 and damaged a second.

As the longer autumn nights approached, German bombers continued to attack Britain. The nocturnal defences were now more formidable than they had been a year before, with Defiants continuing to play their part. For example, on the evening of 22 October Flt Lt George Coleman of No 256 Sqn, flying from Squires Gate, shot down Ju 88A-4 '7T+CH' of 1./KüFlGr 606 as it attempted to attack Merseyside. The first of Coleman's seven victories came down near Woore, in Shropshire, two of the crew having bailed out but the others being killed. A week later No 256 Sqn's 'A' Flight, which was detached at Ballyhalbert, in Northern Ireland, formed the basis for No 153 Sqn – the last Defiant fighter unit to be established.

No 151 Sqn was back in action off the coast of Norfolk on 31 October when Plt Off Alex McRitchie (in AA417) and his gunner Plt Off Sampson attacked a Ju 88 25 miles east of Yarmouth. This was the first of the Australian's four victories. They damaged a second Ju 88 during the same sortie. On the night of 15/16 November, and flying with Sgt Albert Beale (a very successful gunner), McRitchie shot down another Ju 88 in the same area.

Around the country through the summer additional flights had been formed with Turbinlite Havocs which, although not particularly successful, did allow new crews to hone their night flying skills before moving on to more efficacious types. Once such crew consisted of Sgts Harry White and Michael Allen, which joined No 1455 Flight at Tangmere during October. They would remain with the unit for the next 15 months before joining No 141 Sqn in 1943 and claiming a dozen victories flying Beaufighter VIFs and Mosquito IIs. No 1455 Flight was commanded by Battle of Britain ace Sqn Ldr Jerrard Latimer, who was described as being 'rather remote'. He was soon replaced by Sqn Ldr George Budd, who had three victories and four damaged to his name.

Elsewhere, No 1459 Flight welcomed a distinguished new CO in the form of Sqn Ldr James Nicholson VC. He had received his Victoria Cross the previous year following service with No 249 Sqn during the height of the Battle of Britain. Later, in October 1941, No 85 Sqn was joined by another future ace when Plt Off John Hall arrived. He flew with Sgt Bill Skelton, who later became one of the most successful nightfighter navigators. However, the squadron suffered a great loss on 31 October when its CO, Wg Cdr A T D 'Scruffy' Sanders, and his radio operator, Plt Off S Austin, were lost during an intercept over the Channel off Deal at 2010 hrs. It is thought that their Havoc II AH520 may have been hit by return fire.

Although the Turbinlite concept was known to be ineffective, it was persevered with for another year. Indeed, No 1460 Flight became the last such unit to be established with the aircraft at the end of 1941. Its first CO



One of the newly trained aviators posted into No 125 Sqn was Plt Off John Surman (left), who became an ace during 1944. His colleague in the flying jacket is Plt Off Colmore (*J Surman*)

No 151 Sqn's CO, Sqn Ldr 'Blackie' Smith, and his gunner, Flt Sgt A G Beale, are all smiles as they pose for the camera on the Defiant in which they had shot down a Do 217 and damaged a Ju 88 off Cromer the previous evening (19/20 February 1942). The Dornier was Smith's sixth victory, and also his only one in the Defiant (*author's collection*)



was Spitfire ace Sqn Ldr George Denholm, who was to hand over command to future ace Sqn Ldr 'Black' Morton the following spring.

Turbinlite had survived into 1942, but the use of aerial mines would not. At the end of November 1941 the RAF decided to abandon the use of this weapon, resulting in the disbandment of No 93 Sqn on 6 December.

As always with the British winter, weather was as much of a threat as the enemy, and on 7 December Flt Lt R L F Day struck trees in poor visibility at 1900 hrs whilst coming in to land at Drem following an unsuccessful night interception. His No 410 Sqn Defiant (V1137) crashed and burst into flames, trapping the pilot. Despite his injuries, gunner Flt Sgt J J Townsend returned to the blazing wreckage to pull his seriously injured pilot to safety. Townsend later received the George Medal for his bravery.

At the end of the year several more future aces were posted to No 125 Sqn, which was based at Fairwood Common and charged with defending the port of Swansea. Flt Lt Jim Bailey arrived as flight commander, whilst Plt Off John Surman came straight from training. The latter – a future Mosquito ace with No 604 Sqn – gave his thoughts on the Defiant to the author:

'It was the first operational aircraft presented to me, and that fact alone endears her to me. Mind you, I never enjoyed fully operational activities against the enemy in the Defiant, for which I am truly grateful! We did attack various drogues and targets on Chesil Beach, but as soon as my gunner touched the trigger the aircraft did graceful swoops around the sky, which cannot have helped the accuracy of the fire.

'The defining feature of a Defiant pilot was that his right shoe usually enjoyed a treatment of shoe polish, whereas his left shoe always took on tints of charcoal grey. This was due to a persistent oil leak from somewhere over the left brake pedal that seemed to afflict all Defiants. Apart from that she was very forgiving, but I wonder what a spin would have been like with that turret, which must have upset the aerodynamic features more than somewhat.'

NEW YEAR, SAME MISSION

Operations continued relatively uneventfully into 1942, with No 125 Sqn flying its final Defiant sorties on 8 February. Amongst those airborne were Flt Lt Jim Bailey and Plt Off John Matthews, both of whom would become aces in the near future. Twelve days later, during a sortie at dusk in a clear night sky on 19/20 February, Sqn Ldr 'Blackie' Smith of No 151 Sqn, flying with Flt Sgt Beale, caught a Do 217 off Cromer and shot it down to claim his sixth victory. This proved to be his only kill with the Defiant – Smith also damaged a Ju 88 during the same mission.

In mid March AI-equipped Defiant IIs began to reach No 96 Sqn, which was still defending northwest England under the command of the experienced Sqn Ldr Dickie Haine. He recalled his memories of this period;

'When I arrived the squadron was flying Defiant Is, and I teamed up with gunner Flt Lt Bob Smith as we got on well together. As luck would have it, as I took over the squadron there was a marked falling



Defiant AA355/ZJ-J of No 96 Sqn is prepared for another sortie from Valley in June 1942, just as the unit was being re-equipped. The fighter is fitted with AI radar aerials aft of the exhaust stubs (R C Haine)

In 1942 No 23 Sqn received some Boston IIIs to supplement its Havocs on intruding. One of them was AL459/YP-W, which was regularly flown by Sgt Ernie Williams. However, it force landed in France on 28 June, as seen here, with Plt Off Coventry and his crew being taken prisoner (M W Payne)



off of enemy action in our area. The unit later re-equipped with Defiant IIs, which were fitted with Mk III AI radar. I can't remember specific details about this equipment except that we carried out quite a few practice interceptions using the radar, which had a pilot display screen in the cockpit. Its performance was poor and the radar unreliable, but I recall it was very useful as a homing device for the "Babs" beam approach beacon system.

'My main contribution during this period was to aid in the conversion of all the squadron

pilots from single- to twin-engined aircraft, as they switched from the Defiant to the Beaufighter.'

Meanwhile, at Wittering, No 151 Sqn, led by Sqn Ldr 'Blackie' Smith, began re-equipping with Mosquito IIs, the first of which arrived on 6 April.

No 23 Sqn's intruding Havoc Is were supplemented by Boston IIIs early in the New Year, and these continued their nocturnal activities over the Continent. On 24 March Sgt Ernie Williams (a Rhodesian who was later to achieve seven victories) flew his first operational trip to Evreux. That same night the now Sqn Ldr Hoare also flew there and 'saw a twin-tailed aircraft with navigation lights flying towards me. There was no time to open fire and I had to dive to avoid collision'. However, he had better luck near the same airfield late on 2 April;

'I got behind a Do 217 and he turned his lights out when I was about 2000 ft behind him, but I was still able to see him as it was so bright. I followed him round and opened fire from astern at about 150 yards. I fired two or three long bursts, then closed in to 70 yards and gave him three or four more bursts. Many strikes were seen on the fuselage and engines. I then saw another Do 217 near Evreux, so I climbed up and got behind him, before opening fire at short range. I again saw many strikes on his fuselage and engines. Owing to the number of strikes, both bombers must have been severely damaged.'

Shortly afterwards Hoare was promoted to command the unit, but by now No 23 Sqn's intruder sorties mainly saw it attacking enemy targets on the ground with bombs.

The re-equipment of Fighter Command's nightfighter units continued into the spring of 1942, and it coincided with a switch in the Luftwaffe's bombing policy that saw the start of the so-called 'Baedeker' raids. These targeted relatively unimportant, but culturally significant, cities that were reputedly selected from the German *Baedeker* tourist guide, beginning with attacks on Exeter,

Bath, Norwich and York in late April 1942.

No 85 Sqn's Havocs would play their part in defending these iconic cities. On the evening of 8 May Sqn Ldr Maude had a fleeting contact, whilst just before midnight Flt Lt Geoff Howitt, recently returned from a rest tour, had similar frustrations. He and his crew found no fewer than five contacts, as the unit records describe;

'While on Silent Patrol at 11,000 ft contact was made at 0110 hrs below and to starboard at maximum range. The enemy aircraft was below and already taking evasive action, gently weaving. The Havoc followed at maximum speed but the enemy aircraft dived to starboard and drew away. A second brief contact was made below and to starboard. It was lost in 30 seconds. Three contacts were obtained at once, two to starboard and one to port, all below. The port target was selected, but then IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) showed that it was a friendly machine.'

Although the Havoc I/II had been a very useful stopgap that had served No 85 Sqn well for more than a year, it was clear that an aircraft with a much higher performance was now needed. Nonetheless, it was in a No 85 Sqn Havoc II that the man destined to be the most successful Allied nightfighter pilot of World War 2 began his combat career when, off Ipswich, on 1 June Plt Off Branse Burbridge (with Flt Sgt Webster as his radar operator) attacked a Ju 88 that he probably destroyed.

The following night, with no cloud and good visibility, 25 enemy bombers attacked Canterbury on the second of three *'Baedeker'* raids. Thirteen of No 85 Sqn's Havocs were launched, and they set up various patrols at 12,000 ft that were positioned in such a way so as to intercept the raid and compensate for the Havoc's lack of speed. Sqn Ldr Maude attacked a Do 217 that he claimed destroyed, although Flt Sgt Gibbs' aircraft was lost – he was picked up by an air-sea rescue launch. Branse Burbridge was also airborne, as he later recalled to the author;

'I took off at about midnight to do some AI practice, but control then sent us off towards Canterbury as there was a stream of enemy bombers reported. We had been airborne more than two hours when my operator, Sgt Webster, picked up a contact approaching us head on, and I had to dive hard to starboard to get astern of it, which proved difficult as it was weaving about a good deal. After about five minutes I gained a visual – it was over Canterbury, where many fires were burning – and I could see that it was a Do 217. However, it may have seen us for as I closed in it cut its speed and dived away just as I opened fire, though my shooting was good, as I saw many hits of the explosive ammunition on the starboard engine and the cockpit area. As we shot over the top of it I got a clear view of it, and I particularly remember the exhaust outlets.



The aircrew of No 85 Sqn's 'A' Flight gather in front of one of the unit's improved Havoc IIs at Hunsdon in the summer of 1942. Standing fifth from the right is the flight commander, Sqn Ldr Maude, who downed a Do 217 on the night of 2/3 June. To his immediate left is future ace Flt Lt Geoff Howitt, while fourth from the left in the back row is Sgt Sullivan, who, the previous summer, had downed a Ju 88 (via C H Goss)

The leading Allied nightfighter pilot of World War 2 was Plt Off Branse Burbridge. All of his victories were claimed with the Mosquito, but he cut his teeth flying Havocs with No 85 Sqn, claiming a probable and a damaged in 1942 (B A Burbridge)



'Although a couple of other pilots from my squadron said they had seen an aircraft falling in flames over Canterbury at that time, my bomber was only credited to me as probably destroyed. This was my last combat in the Havoc.'

Off the east coast on 5 June, No 1460 Flight's CO, Sqn Ldr 'Black' Morton, and his navigator, Plt Off Slater, were in a Turbinlite Havoc (with Flt Lt Freddie Lister of No 43 Sqn on their wing in a Hurricane II) when they had a rare encounter with the enemy. Morton recalled;

'Contact was made under GCI control on an enemy aircraft approaching Newcastle from the east at 14,000 ft when it was 40 miles off the coast. Contact was made in the air at a range of 8000 ft and maximum speed was immediately produced. After an eight-minute chase the range had been reduced to 3000 ft, with the Havoc slightly below the enemy aircraft. The satellite (Hurricane) was sent forward to be in position to attack when the target was illuminated, but unfortunately the fighter climbed and became visible to the target against the light northern sky. The enemy aircraft immediately did a steep turn and dived away, dropping its bombs in open country.

'The enemy aircraft could have been illuminated at this time, but the Hurricane was hopelessly placed for an attack after the target's turn, and as the target was running away from the Havoc at nearly 100 mph, no useful purpose would have been placed by illuminating it.'

The CO of another Turbinlite unit, seven-victory ace Sqn Ldr Ken Blair of No 1453 Flight at Wittering, endured a similar experience when he had three contacts with an intruder in company with a No 486 Sqn Hurricane flown by Plt Off Vaughn Fittall in late July. Blair noted;

'Enemy aircraft was dead ahead and well below. It throttled back and put wheels and flaps down, but in losing height both the Boston and Hurricane overshot and lost contact. Second contact was at a height of 4500 ft. Again, the enemy aircraft was dead ahead and well below. The same procedure was adopted, but again the Boston and the Hurricane overshot. A visual was then made on a third contact, but this occurred just as the Hurricane pilot left the Boston in order to investigate an aircraft that he had seen, and which subsequently proved to be a Wellington. The enemy aircraft was almost dead ahead of the Boston, and was recognised as a Ju 88. It was followed for about five minutes, but as the Hurricane did not reappear, the Boston broke off contact with the enemy aircraft and did not expose the light.'

The experiences described by both of these veteran fighter pilots perfectly illustrated the weakness of the Turbinlite concept.



Sqn Ldr Ken Blair, who had become an ace during 1940, commanded the Havoc Turbinlite-equipped No 1453 Flight at Wittering. He also briefly led the unit once it had become No 532 Sqn in September 1942 (P H T Green Collection)

Turbinlite Havocs and Bostons of No 1453 Flt sit dispersed at Wittering during the summer of 1942. The nearest aircraft is W8343/B, which Sqn Ldr Blair flew on the final trip of his tour on 23 September 1942 (G A Henwood via R L Ward)



OVER SEA AND SAND

In the early months of the war four Blenheim fighter squadrons – Nos 235, 236, 248 and 254 – were formed specifically to perform long-range shipping protection missions under Fighter Command control. However, on 27 February 1940 they were transferred to Coastal Command, where they were used in the coastal fighter role. Patrolling mainly over the North Sea, Blenheims from these units would occasionally engage Luftwaffe aircraft as they targeted merchant vessels.

However, with the commencement of the German invasion of the West in May 1940, the squadrons were drawn into other operations that saw them effectively returned to Fighter Command control. Their activities off Dunkirk and during the Battle of Britain on defensive fighter operations – particularly those of No 235 Sqn – have been covered in detail in Chapter 2.

Although flying converted bombers on over-sea protection duties, a number of successful pilots (including some future aces) flew with the coastal fighter squadrons, and some of them would achieve at least part of their victory totals in Blenheims. Among the future aces was Flt Lt Ken Gillies, who was a flight commander in No 254 Sqn flying fishery protection patrols until he returned to No 66 Sqn (with whom he had served pre-war) in April 1940. He would achieve acedom with the unit during the summer of 1940, before being killed on 4 October.

Following the fall of Dunkirk, Gillies' former unit, No 254 Sqn, saw action against the Luftwaffe once again shortly after dawn on 21 June, when three Blenheim IVFs that were escorting two Sunderland flying boats on a convoy patrol broke off and attacked an He 115 seaplane, which escaped with damage. The section that relieved the Blenheim IVFs also got into the action later that same day when it had an inconclusive fight with a Do 18 flying boat, whose return fire killed one of the Blenheim air gunners.

Moving through several bases in the south and west of England, No 236 Sqn also had a successful action on 11 July while escorting a destroyer force, as the unnamed section leader related in the official Coastal Command narrative of the day's events:

'I throttled back and led my section in a steep turn to starboard. I quickly overtook the enemy aircraft, and recognised that it was an He 111. I ordered the section into line astern formation. "Red 2"

No 254 Sqn was one of the units formed specifically for the coastal fighter role. Setting out near Aberdeen on just such a mission on 31 November 1940 is Blenheim IVF Z6029/QY-L (No 111 Sqn records)





One of the most successful early 'coastal fighter' pilots was Plt Off Graham Russell of No 236 Sqn, seen here on the right, with his observer Sgt Ken Hutchins in the centre and air gunner Sgt Eric Pert to left. Behind them is their Blenheim IVF V6078/ND-S, which, unusually, has the crew's victory tally marked aft of the gunner's turret (E Pert)

Another successful pilot that flew V6078 during its time with No 236 Sqn was Plt Off George Melville-Jackson, who is seen here later in the war. By then he had become an ace (G H Melville-Jackson)



and "Red 3" took up the attack, the enemy aircraft taking avoiding action at sea level. "Red 2" (Plt Off B M McDonough in L6816) got in several bursts and reported smoke from both of the He 111's engines. Owing to a shortage of petrol and ammunition, and the proximity of the French coast, I recalled the section and returned to base. "Red 2" most certainly crippled the enemy aircraft, but none of us saw the He 111 strike the water.'

A few days later No 236 Sqn's CO, Sqn Ldr P E Drew, claimed a

Bf 109 destroyed, and by early August the unit had settled at St Eval, in Cornwall, and commenced escort work over the Southwest Approaches. Amongst its pilots were Plt Offs Aubrey Inniss, George Melville-Jackson and Graham Russell, all of whom were to later achieve some notable successes. On the 21st Inniss led Russell and Plt Off Nunn as escorts for an Empire flying boat heading from Poole to the Scillies. Soon after they had taken off the Blenheim pilots spotted two Ju 88s attacking their airfield. Chasing after the trailing bomber, they got in good bursts with the front guns as the trio of Blenheim IVFs chased their quarry as far as Land's End, where it escaped into clouds. All three crews were each credited with having damaged the bomber.

Over at Bircham Newton, in Norfolk, No 235 Sqn escorted an attack by Albacores on Calais during the late afternoon of 11 September. However, approaching the target they were intercepted by six Bf 109s, which downed two Blenheims and several Albacores. That same day 'B' Flight escorted Blenheim IV bombers to Boulogne, where four Bf 109s were attacked, the unit diary noting that one was credited to 'Blood 'n Guts Fletch' (Flt Lt A W Fletcher). He was promoted to squadron leader soon afterwards and later led a Beaufighter squadron with distinction in the Mediterranean.

From Cornwall, No 236 Sqn was again in action over the Bay of Biscay on 23 September, as the unit records described;

'An enemy aircraft was seen six miles to the west. After making sure it was an He 111, Plt Off Inniss (the leader) turned to port and Plt Off Russell pulled up, throttled back and, with one long burst, had good results – a damaged port engine. Plt Off Inniss then started to attack, but Sgt Smith, who had been lagging behind, delivered a beam attack from the starboard side. The enemy aircraft fired a distress signal and its undercarriage came down. Plt Off Russell then made an attack. The enemy was now down to sea level, and Plt Off Inniss attacked. During a burst of fire from the latter the enemy machine struck the sea and sank within three minutes.'

Plt Off Graham Russell (in Z5733) saw further combat two days later off the Channel Islands;

'A Do 18 was seen and I attacked from its starboard quarter – smoke was seen to come from the rear engine. The Do 18 was now down at sea

level, flying slowly. Another attack was made from astern without result. A beam attack was made, whereupon the machine crashed into the sea.'

Russell had shot down Oberleutnant zur See Stelle's Do 18 'M2+EK' of 2./KufI Gr 106.

With the Battle of Britain still raging, the coastal Blenheims continued to find action over the Channel too, with some of No 235 Sqn's Belgian pilots sharing in the destruction of two He 60 reconnaissance seaplanes off the Needles early on 8 October. A few days later at Bircham the squadron celebrated its first anniversary with a party, during which 108 gallons of beer were consumed!

There was no operational flying on 14 October, but 'B' Flight (including the only Blenheim ace, Flg Off Reg Peacock) flew down to Thorney Island and was soon back in the thick of things, as the following telegram announced – 'Sutton, one before breakfast!' The diary entry for 15 October gave further details;

"B" Flight announced its arrival at Thorney Island with the destruction of another He 60, this time shot down by Sgt Sutton while on patrol. The flight had been escorting a crippled submarine home when the enemy aircraft was encountered, presumably about to attack the sub. The flight most likely saved it.'

On 3 November a section from No 248 Sqn, led by the recently promoted Flt Lt Edric McHardy, clashed with He 111s off Norway, one of which was credited as a probable to the young Kiwi. He had almost certainly attacked an aircraft from I./KG 26, which subsequently crashed at Hevdland, killing Unteroffizier Josef Mendler and his crew.

No 236 Sqn's Flg Off Graham Russell was also successful during the autumn, his air gunner, Sgt Eric Pert, recalling to the author how his pilot achieved his next victory;

'My first operational sortie with No 236 Sqn was made on 6 November 1940 when I replaced a gunner in an established crew. We got caught in a box barrage over Brest whilst trying to spot a *Hipper* class cruiser in the harbour. We also flew over an enemy convoy and shot down its escorting Do 24, before passing an Me 110 returning from Falmouth – we ignored each other! We landed in an aircraft full of

Another of the coastal fighter units was No 248 Sqn, which by the spring of 1941 was based at Dyce in northeastern Scotland. Blenheim IVF L9394/WR-B was photographed here in early 1941 (P H T Green collection)



shrapnel holes and with our observer badly wounded. I am pleased to say that the rest of my flying did not follow such an intensive pattern! My pilot, who had had previous success, was awarded the DFC.'

Their victim was actually captured Bréguet 521 flying boat '5G+FM' of *Seenotflugkommando* 1, flown by Oberfeldwebel Ulrich Janke.

The number of coastal fighter squadrons gradually increased in 1940, and in December a flight from No 235 Sqn, which included Reg Peacock, flew to Aldergrove to merge with a flight from No 236 Sqn to form No 272 Sqn, led by Sqn Ldr A W Fletcher. No 235 Sqn's diary noted the loss of the prolific 'Pissy' Peacock;

'We will all miss him as he was a "foundation member", and he shot down the first ME 109 to fall to the squadron on 11 May. His cheerful good natured temperament and confident mastery of his job as a fighting pilot made him universally respected by all.'

No 272 Sqn flew operationally from Northern Ireland into the spring of 1941, before receiving Beaufighter ICs. From St Eval, No 236 Sqn continued operations over Biscay, with three of its successful pilots, Inniss, Russell and Melville-Jackson, encountering an He 115 seaplane on 12 December;

'As "K" (Inniss) broke away, his rear gunner got in a good burst. "L" (Russell) then made an attack, slightly diving on the enemy aircraft. He opened fire and broke away under heavy return fire at 200 ft. The rear gun of the enemy aircraft ceased firing at this time. "F" (Melville-Jackson) then made a beam attack. "L", on his second run, had the enemy aircraft in his sights when a side window blew out. He then made an attack from astern, although his front guns failed to fire. "F" made two further attacks. On the last attack he saw bursts enter the rear of the fuselage. "F's" rear gunner also fired off 300 rounds on the last attack run. In spite of this action the enemy aircraft made off towards Ushant.'

Russell, however, in N3602/FA-L had to crash-land back at St Eval due to the combat damage.

Although Beaufighters began reaching Coastal Command fighter squadrons in early 1941, it was the Blenheim IVFs that bore the brunt of the action for much of the year, including occasional encounters with enemy aircraft. One of the first came on 6 January when Sam McHardy of No 248 Sqn chased a reconnaissance aircraft, but he was unable to catch it.

No 236 Sqn remained at St Eval, and shortly before 0800 hrs on 29 January V5432/ND-A, flown by Flg Off 'Digger' Cotes-Preedy, crashed shortly after takeoff and burst into flames. Having extricated himself, he forced his way back into the aircraft to drag the observer out, before returning to rescue the trapped gunner, whose hatch had jammed. Hacking his way into the blazing aircraft, he saved him too. Cotes-Preedy spent four months in hospital recovering from his burns, and was later awarded the George Medal. He subsequently made several claims when flying Tempest Vs in 1944.

In February Blenheim IVFs replaced No 608 Sqn's aged Anson Is. One of the unit's pilots at this time was Plt Off Eric Gibbs, who had been credited with damaging two He 115s during the previous November (in 1943, as CO of Spitfire-equipped No 54 Sqn in Australia, he became an ace defending Darwin against the Japanese). From now

Among the aviators serving with No 248 Sqn in 1941 was Plt Off E H 'Sam' McHardy, a New Zealander who was to become one of the most distinguished coastal strike pilots of the war (P H T Green collection)



on, however, it was fairly mundane patrol work for Coastal Command's Blenheim fighters, with only the occasional brush with the Luftwaffe.

THE SANDS OF AFRICA

No 30 Sqn, then based in Dhibban, Jordan, had been the first overseas unit to re-equip with Blenheim Is in January 1938. On 11 June 1940 – the day after Italy declared war on Britain – the unit, now based at Ismailia, in Egypt, was ordered to strip out the bomb racks from half of its aircraft and replace them with Browning gun packs. Overnight, the bomber unit was also given the long-range fighter role too, despite having had no training in this mission! A few days later it moved to Mariyut to provide defence for the port of Alexandria and escorts for Allied vessels.

No 30 Sqn experienced its first action during one such patrol over the battleship HMS *Royal Sovereign* north of Mersa Matruh on 13 July when Flg Off Le Dieu shot down an Italian Savoia-Marchetti SM.79 bomber. On the debit side, Flg Off Lea's aircraft was shot down by return fire from the bomber.

On 15 August No 30 Sqn's Blenheim IFs and No 55 Sqn's Blenheim I bombers targeted Italian seaplanes moored in the harbour at Bomba, in Libya. Future ace Flg Off Derek Walker (in K7180) of No 30 Sqn opened his account when he destroyed a CANT Z.506B on the water, as the operations diary recorded;

'No 55 Sqn carried out a low-level bombing attack on the flying boats and seaplanes, followed by No 30 Sqn with a low-flying front and rear gun attack. No 30 Sqn attacked by means of converging strafing runs until all the front gun ammunition was exhausted. One CANT Z.506B seaplane was seen to tip up on its nose into the water. All the moored aircraft must have been badly damaged and riddled by bullets.'

There were few air combat opportunities for No 30 Sqn's fighters until 10 September, when ten SM.79s attacked the Egyptian town of Sidi Barrani. Two Blenheim IFs were scrambled and Flt Lt Frank Marlow (in K7096) and Plt Off Jarvis each claimed a bomber destroyed. The next day Sgt Pearce caught another SM.79 over Alexandria and shot it down too after four attacking passes. Then on the 15th Marlow (again in K7096) and Jarvis chased a quartet of Savoia-Marchetti tri-motor bombers and hit one that was later confirmed as destroyed.

OVER THE RED SEA

For much of the inter-war period the RAF's maritime patrol duties in the Persian Gulf area had been the responsibility of the stately flying boats of No 203 Sqn. However, with war clouds looming in late August 1939, the unit began moving with its Short Singapores to Aden, from where it began patrols over the Red Sea and its approaches. By the end of the year the squadron had commenced re-equipment with Blenheim IVFs for the long-range fighter role, as there was a potential threat to shipping from Italian aircraft based in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Among its personnel were several pilots that would later achieve success, including 20-year-old Plt Off Anthony Watson who, by mid November 1942, had become an ace.

On 11 June 1940 (the day after the Italian declaration of war), No 203 Sqn sortied six Blenheim IVFs from its base at Khormaksar,



Blenheim IVF L9237/NT-J of Aden-based No 203 Sqn sits forlornly after its tailwheel had collapsed upon landing at Perim Island, in the Red Sea, on 13 May 1940. Repaired and flown out two days later, the aircraft was the mount of Plt Off Anthony Watson and Flt Lt Jimmie Pike throughout much of the rest of 1940. L9237 was shot down off Crete in combat with Bf 110s on 27 May 1941 (author's collection)

in Aden, on reconnaissance missions to various towns in Italian-held territory, including the port of Massawa and the Eritrean capital of Assab. It was over the latter on 13 June that the unit first encountered the *Regia Aeronautica* when a Blenheim was attacked and damaged by Fiat CR.42 fighters.

The unit's main task was shipping escort, but No 203 Sqn was also available for offensive work, such as when two Blenheims strafed a trio of Caproni Ca.133s on Mille airfield on 26 July – another of No 203 Sqn's aircraft led Blenheim I bombers from No 8 Sqn back to Mille the following day. During the morning of 1 August a pair of No 203 Sqn fighters escorted more Blenheim Is from Nos 8 and 39 Sqn when they were sent to attack the recently discovered airfield at Chinele. When the bombers were intercepted by Italian fighters No 203 Sqn's Blenheim IVFs intervened, and they may have damaged one of the Fiat biplanes. Shortly thereafter, Sqn Ldr A K H Solarno assumed command of No 203 Sqn.

The Italians moved on British Somaliland in early August, and on the 8th No 203 Sqn's long-range fighters had to provide cover over Berbera. During this operation Plt Off Corbould attacked a trio of SM.79s, damaging one. Further aerial attacks followed as the Italians advanced along the coast, and there was considerable air action for Aden-based units. British forces withdrew into Berbera, pending withdrawal from British Somaliland, where they came under sustained air attack. The troops were protected from the Italian bombers by No 203 Sqn's Blenheim fighters whenever possible until the evacuation was completed on 19 August.

The fighter Blenheims then saw little air action until early October, when Plt Off Hes Barnitt used L9237/NT-J to chase down an aircraft that had bombed HMS *Auckland*, although he was unable to catch his quarry. However, a few days later on the afternoon of 15 October, Barnitt intercepted three SM.79s that had just bombed a convoy in the Red Sea. He made a sustained attack on Sottotenente Gheradini's aircraft from 6^a *Squadriglia*, putting out two of its engines. The crippled bomber duly crashed into the sea while attempting to limp back to Djibouti. No 203 Sqn at last had its first victory of the war!

Five days later, Barnitt (in T2112) was again over a convoy coming down from Suez when it was attacked by a lone SM.79 that he was credited with destroying, although the bomber actually escaped on this

occasion. Sadly, after landing at Kamaran Island to refuel, his aircraft struck the roof of a mosque and crashed on takeoff, killing the promising young New Zealander and his observer, Sgt A J Finch. His wireless operator/gunner, AC Beaumont, survived, however.

Another of No 203 Sqn's pilots was Flt Lt Jimmie Pike, who in 1937 had won the Sword of Honour at Cranwell. On 4 November he was flying over shipping in the Red Sea when he attacked an SM.79, sending it home with two of the crew dead. This was the first of a number of air and ground claims that Pike was to make with the unit.

No 203 Sqn's first significant action of 1941 came on 4 February when two Blenheim IVs flown by the newly promoted Sqn Ldr Pike and Flt Lt Gethin strafed Makale airfield, destroying three SM.79s, before they were set upon by a number of 410^a *Squadriglia* CR.32s and sent home with battle damage. Two days later the pair hit Alomata airfield shortly before dusk in a highly effective strafing attack that left eight Ca.133s in flames. Pike was awarded the DFC following these missions. The attacks were not without cost, however, with Sqn Ldr Solarno being forced down by 410^a *Squadriglia* ace Sottotenente Veronese during a repeat visit to Makale on 18 February. Two of Solarno's crew were killed in this incident. Veronese had also attacked the second No 203 Sqn Blenheim involved in this mission, and it crash-landed in Aden.

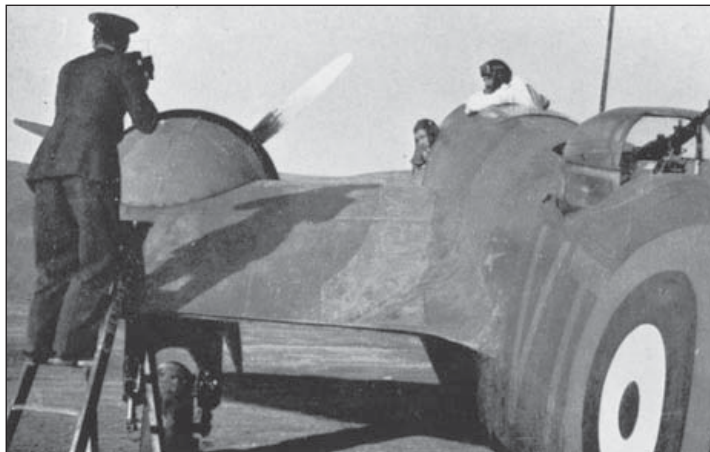
By now British forces were on the offensive, and in support of the assault on the Italian stronghold at Keren on 24 February, a trio of No 203 Sqn's aircraft hit Addis Ababa airfield. This mission was the exception, however, as the unit primarily flew shipping patrols. Indeed, it was an aircraft from No 203 Sqn that located an Italian destroyer force in the Red Sea on 2 April, leading to their destruction. This proved to be the unit's swansong, for two weeks later it moved north to Kabrit, in Egypt, in preparation for operations over Greece.

— A GREEK TRAGEDY —

Following the Italian invasion of Greece on 28 October 1940, the Blenheims of No 30 Sqn were amongst the first British forces despatched to the region – eight fighters were led into Eleusis, near Athens, on 3 November by Sqn Ldr U Y Shannon. The unit's first sortie was flown the next day.

The onset of the winter weather over the mountains of northern Greece a short while later was a portent of the difficult conditions to come. Yet despite the deteriorating weather, Greek forces did remarkably well on the ground.

For No 30 Sqn, it was the unit's bombers that initially saw the greatest action, the fighters being used both as their escorts and for ground strafing. On 18 December four of the fighters mounted an offensive reconnaissance sweep of Valona harbour, in Albania. They were intercepted by six CR.42s and three Fiat G.50bis, which sent one Blenheim crashing into the sea on fire. Canadian Flg Off Bob Davidson had a brief fight with a G.50 that he hit. However, he had to break off his attack in order to assist another Blenheim, leaving a frustrated Davidson to claim a probable. In the event, the G.50 of 154^o *Gruppo* had been badly hit and subsequently crashed while attempting to land at Valona.



Blenheim IF K7179/VT-B forms the 'canvas' for the official Air Ministry photographer, who is himself photographing Flg Offs 'Bud' Richardson (front) and Bob Davidson before the German invasion of Greece. The aircraft was regularly flown throughout the spring by Davidson (*Official*)

In early 1941 No 30 Sqn sent a detachment of Blenheim IFs – including K7095/VT-G seen here – to Paramythia in the northern mountainous region of Greece. Previously flown on occasion by Flg Off Bob Davidson, K7095 was hit by return fire from a Ju 88 over Athens on 11 April 1941 and No 30 Sqn CO Sqn Ldr 'Percy' Milward and his crew forced to bail out (*via John Hamlin*)

Early on 30 December five fighter Blenheims flew a defensive patrol off the west coast near Preveza and Levkas, splitting into two sections. One attacked a Z.506B of 190^a *Squadriglia* flown by Tenente Domenico Bazzi, the seaplane being shot down into the Mediterranean by Sqn Ldr Shannon and Flg Off C W 'Bud' Richardson, who wrote;

'I did an underneath attack, firing up into his belly, closing to about 25 yards. I then did a series of quarter attacks, closing to 50 yards,

pumping lead into the aircraft until I wondered whatever was holding it up. By this time the aircraft had slowed down considerably, and after I had made a front quarter pass I saw him dip a wing and crash into the sea just as I broke off my attack.'

That was the last encounter of the year for No 30 Sqn, whose next brush with the enemy in the air was not until 20 January 1941 when, during a raid on Athens, a Blenheim IF flown by Flt Sgt D J Innes-Smith shared in the destruction of a Z.1007 bomber with two No 80 Sqn Gladiators. On 22 February Flg Off Bob Davidson made his first step to aedon whilst on patrol with new No 30 Sqn CO, Sqn Ldr R A 'Percy' Milward. Flying off the west coast of Corfu, Davidson spotted a Z.506B, and the pair attacked from out of the sun in quick succession. Davidson then made a further attack, forcing the seaplane to carry out a rough landing in a heavy swell with its engine out. The CANT was from 191^a *Squadriglia*, and it was strafed and sunk by a Gladiator the next day.

Also active on 22 February in a fighter Blenheim was No 30 Sqn pilot, and fellow future ace, Flg Off Derek Walker, who was leading Flg Off 'Bud' Richardson on a sortie when they sighted six Z.1007s near Preveza. Walker subsequently wrote;



'I dived down in a beam attack on the formation. Later, an aircraft in the "box" dropped down out of control and disappeared into a stretch of water south of Levkas. I returned to attack the formation as it headed north from Levkas, and delivered two quarter and one astern attacks on the No 3 aircraft. After I had put about 1000 rounds into the bomber, oil and bits started to pour from the starboard engine, and it slowed consistently. I closed in again and was hit by heavy crossfire from the rest of the formation, which had formed up on their crippled member. I continued to rake the rear gun positions until my guns jammed, after which I broke off the attack and headed homeward.'

The destruction of the second CANT was later confirmed, and Walker shared its demise with Richardson. These were Walker's first officially recognised victories.

Offensive sorties also featured during this period in Greece, such as on 24 March when five Blenheim fighters flew via Crete in a series of strafing attacks against airfields in the Dodecanese, Bob Davidson flying one of the aircraft that targeted Scarpanto. Three days later six of No 30 Sqn's fighters were moved up to Paramythia, in the western mountains, from where early the following morning they flew a strafing attack against Lecce, in southern Italy, which was reportedly crammed full of aircraft – many were hit and damaged.

The German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia on 6 April then changed the complex of the campaign at a stroke. Greek airfields now came under sustained air attack by the Luftwaffe, and three Ju 88s were claimed by No 30 Sqn over Athens during the next few nights, although the CO was hit by return fire from one and had to bail out.

In an increasingly difficult situation, British forces had withdrawn to a line that ran through Mount Olympus by 14 April. With Yugoslavia quickly conquered, increased Luftwaffe activity over Greece was now evident. The following morning around two-dozen Ju 88s appeared over Athens, and amongst other defenders sent aloft to repel them were four Blenheim IFs, one of which was flown by Plt Off T H C Alison. He saw ten Ju 88s at 12,000 ft just as they tipped over into their dives, the German machines targeting vessels in the harbour. Alison fired at one but had to break away in the dive, although his air gunner, Sgt Connors, fired at another from close range and claimed to have hit it. Several Allied ships were badly hit, however.

Later that day, in an effort to avoid being outflanked, the Allies commenced a further withdrawal to Thermopylae. With the Allied situation deteriorating, some Greek elements began negotiating with the Germans.

On 15 April No 30 Sqn was ordered to send half of its available Blenheim IFs to Crete, from where on the 18th, near Souda Bay anchorage, Flg Off Andy Smith spotted some Italian torpedo-bombers. He hit Tenente Barbani's SM.79 of 281^a *Squadriglia*, which eventually came down in the sea off Camilloni Island, before attacking a second aircraft that he damaged prior to his own machine being hit by return fire. The SM.79s had still managed to torpedo the oiler *British Science*, however.

No 30 Sqn began evacuating in its entirety from the mainland to Crete shortly thereafter, and on the 20th there was a large air battle over Athens that was regarded as the nemesis for the RAF in Greece. Flg Off



Three of No 30 Sqn's most successful pilots outside their rustic local accommodation at Maleme, in Crete. In the centre is Flg Off Andy Smith, who made several claims, and flanking him are future aces Flg Off Bob Davidson (in the hat) and Flt Lt Derek Walker (via John Hamlin)

Bob Davidson flew up to Eleusis that day, later commenting on the number of German fighters that he saw en route;

'It was a grand show. I didn't think we had so many. I flew round and round with them, and then to my horror realised that they weren't Hurricanes at all, but '109s! There was a cloud of smoke in the corner of the aerodrome, so I put down in a flash and hid in the smoke. That's the first and I hope the last time I've ever formed with the enemy.'

Out at sea, No 30 Sqn's Blenheim fighters continued patrols over the convoys, and by 24 April German pressure had led to the full evacuation of Greece. Operation *Demon* began with the Luftwaffe targeting shipping off the ports of southern Greece. It was whilst trying to protect these vessels off Crete on the evening of the 24th that Plt Off L W Basan attacked Feldwebel Walter Zucker's Ju 88 'L1+KH' of 1./LG 1, which limped off trailing black smoke and was later seen to crash. Some reinforcement appeared too when, during the day, Sqn Ldr Jimmie Pike led five Blenheim IVFs from No 203 Sqn into Heraklion, with Sqn Ldr J P D Gethin leading four more in on the 25th. However, neither unit was aware of the other's patrols and initially they chased – or avoided – each other! Eventually, they realised their mistake.

Dawn on 26 April saw the evacuation continue, with both Blenheim squadrons flying patrols. At around midday an aircraft from No 203 Sqn attacked several Stukas found near the cruiser HMS *Coventry*, and at least one was reported as having been shot down. The following morning ships that had left Kalamaka for Crete were targeted by yet more Ju 87s, and No 203 Sqn's patrol again waded into an escorted formation of Stukas. The destruction of one of the latter was credited to Sqn Ldr Pike.

Shipping cover continued to be a priority for No 30 Sqn on 28 April, and during the late afternoon Flt Lt Derek Walker spotted a small ship being attacked by two Bf 110s off Karavi island. He managed to approach the German fighters undetected and open fire, seeing some hits on one of the Messerschmitts before they both dived away. These proved to be Walker's last Blenheim claims.

Operation *Demon* continued into 29 April, and that same morning Crete suffered its first air raids as well. The following day No 203 Sqn's detachment was ordered back to Egypt, its brief part in the Greek tragedy now over. The unit would soon be back in action again further east, however.

Luftwaffe intrusions against targets on Crete continued sporadically, with the first serious attacks not taking place until 14 May, when Maleme was hit and some of No 30 Sqn's aircraft damaged. The unit's five surviving Blenheim IFs were soon pulled back to Egypt. Following the withdrawal,

one of the flight commanders wryly remarked that 'the squadron had been de-Greeced and ex-Creted'!

IRAQ INTERLUDE

In mid April, with the situation in the Balkans deteriorating, a pro-Axis coup d'état led by Rashid Ali saw rebel forces depose the government in Iraq and lay siege to the large RAF base at Habbaniyah. Such reinforcements as could be spared were sent to the area, and on 1 May seven Blenheim IVF fighters under the command of Sqn Ldr Jimmie Pike flew into Lydda, in Palestine. Two days later he led four of them up to Habbaniyah, where they were fired on by the Iraqis as they landed.

At dawn on 4 May the rebels renewed their bombardment, and soon after 0700 hrs Pike (in T2189) and Flg Off P J Gordon-Hall (in T2072) strafed the airfields at Rashid (formerly RAF Hinaidi) and Baghdad, Pike leaving a Hawker Nistr (an Audax variant) in flames. A third Blenheim flown by Sgt Hemsted also strafed some Nistrs at Mosul. And it was Hemsted who, mid-morning on the 7th, scrambled after a solitary Nistr over Habbaniya and after a brief chase shot the biplane down in flames.

It was ground strafing that mainly occupied the No 203 Sqn detachment, however. For example, on 10 May Sqn Ldr Gethin (in L9174) and Flg Off Watson (in L9042) flew from H-4 airfield to attack Iraqi forces in Rutbah Fort. Both pilots had completed several strafing runs when Gethin's aircraft was hit by ground fire and he force landed in the desert. Watson landed alongside the downed Blenheim and tried to help Gethin rescue his trapped crew from the blazing aircraft, but sadly without success. He then returned to H-4, where Gethin subsequently succumbed to his injuries.

At Habbaniya early the following morning, Pike and Hemsted escorted Audaxes and Oxfords attacking Rashid. Disturbingly, further north, 14 Bf 110Cs from 4./ZG 76 and five He 111s from 4./KG 4 began arriving – their ominous presence was duly noted the next day. Early on 13 May No 203 Sqn had its first encounter with the Luftwaffe when one of the Bf 110s attacked a Blenheim over Mosul but caused no damage.

The following day Flg Off Anthony Watson left H-4 for a reconnaissance of Palmyra, in northern Syria, where he spotted a Ju 90 transport. Upon returning to base he requested permission to go back and strafe it. On being asked by theatre commander Maj Gen J G M Clark if he wanted to start a war with Syria, the ebullient 21-year-old replied 'That would be a bloody good idea!' Permission was granted and he swiftly left with two bombers and a pair of Tomahawks. The aircraft duly destroyed at least one He 111 and damaged several other German machines at Palmyra – Watson later received a DFC for his efforts in Iraq. He conducted a further strafing attack on Palmyra soon after dawn on 15 May, while from Habbaniya No 203 Sqn's Blenheim fighters mounted effective attacks on Iraqi airfields, although several pilots also reported being intercepted by the Luftwaffe.

On the 18th a British Army relief column arrived at Habbaniya, and although the Iraqis had withdrawn from the airfield, the fighting continued, with Rashid Ali's forces continuing attempts to retake the town of Fallujah, despite heavy losses. On 26 May a pair of Blenheim

Pt Off Anthony Watson flew Blenheim IVs with No 203 Sqn throughout 1940-41 and was awarded the DFC for his service during the Iraq campaign. He later 'made ace' flying Beaufighter ICs with No 272 Sqn (via C F Shores)



IVFs flew up to Kirkuk, but found no sign of the Luftwaffe, although Italian CR.42s had by then flown in. Pike attacked a Bf 110 there the next day and strafed others near Fallujah.

On 29 May Rashid Ali and his supporters conceded defeat and fled, following which an armistice was signed with local authorities in Baghdad. The Italians and Germans evacuated their forces too.

MALAYAN DEBACLE

The RAF in the Far East finally received fighters in February 1941 when Sqn Ldr C D Hackett's No 27 Sqn, equipped with Blenheim IFs, arrived at Kallang, in Singapore, from India. Sadly, on 4 April the CO was killed during a practice formation flight (in L8507), and so Sqn Ldr F R C Fowle was appointed to replace him. In May the unit moved up to Butterworth, on the west coast of Malaya, before transferring to Sungei Patani, on the east coast, three months later. It was still here at the beginning of December, equipped with a dozen Blenheim IF fighters.

Following reports of Japanese landings on 7 December, No 27 Sqn was ordered to stand by to support III Corps in its defence of Malaya. As daylight broke on the 8th eight Blenheim IFs followed Blenheim I bombers from No 60 Sqn in a dawn attack on the enemy forces landing at Kota Bharu, but heavy rainstorms prevented them from engaging the Japanese troops.

When the crews returned to Sungei Patani they discovered that it had been bombed by a Ki-21 'Sally' formation that had destroyed two aircraft and killed Sgt M Willows and his crew as they had attempted to take off. One of the groundcrew later recalled how the returning Blenheims 'flew low across the airfield, circling round to find a clear strip between the bomb craters that was sufficiently wide enough for them to land on. The seven aeroplanes all returned safely, the pilots claiming to have shot down four of the Jap bombers on the way back'. AC 2 Collis told of how, near Kota Bharu, 33-year-old pilot Sgt 'Ginger' Baldwin had 'lashed into them again and again for as long as his fuel supplies would allow to claim two Mitsubishi bombers shot down. The fuselage was liberally peppered with bullet holes and one of his engines was glowing red hot. His parachute was also ripped open by enemy fire'. These claims have proven impossible to confirm, however.

Following a further Japanese raid later that morning, No 27 Sqn was reduced to just four flyable aircraft, and so the survivors were flown across to Butterworth. There, Japanese attacks and poor organisation had reduced the airfield to a shambles and, with a paratroop attack feared, unserviceable aircraft that were flyable were evacuated to Singapore. The rest of the unit followed suit two days later.

Blenheim IFs of No 27 Sqn are seen lined up at Risalpur on 13 February 1941 before setting out for Singapore. L8540 and L8526/PT-D are nearest to the camera (via D W Warne)





Despite No 27 Sqn being in poor shape, and hardly effective as a fighting unit, some patrols were still flown over the island. One such mission took place on 30 December when, after dark, a pair of Ki-48 'Lily' light bombers of the 90th Sentai bombed Tengah airfield, damaging several Blenheims. 'Ginger' Baldwin just happened to be airborne at the time in one of No 27 Sqn's remaining Blenheims, and he apparently intercepted one of the bombers at 12,000 ft but was unable to catch it. He was described by one of his colleagues who survived the coming debacle as 'big, red-headed and a born pilot'. He went on to detail another combat by Baldwin too, stating that he 'took his kite up towards the end of December with no rear gunner or 'chute and succeeded in breaking up an enemy raid. He got a 'Navy 0' (*sic*).

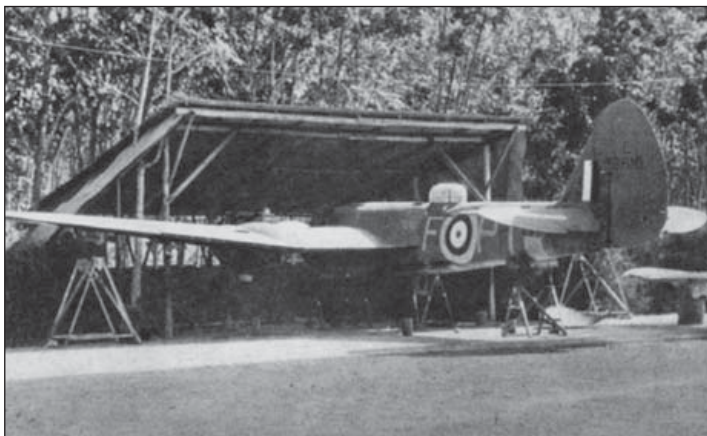
Sadly, the loss of No 27 Sqn's unit records in the chaos of the Malaya campaign means that there is no way of verifying these claims. Baldwin subsequently transferred to No 243 Sqn to fly Buffalos, and he was credited with two victories in the aircraft prior to being killed in action on 22 January 1942.

With Singapore coming under increasing pressure, on 23 January the RAF evacuated its few remaining Blenheims to Sumatra, No 27 Sqn's five surviving aircraft moving to P2 at Pakan Paroe, near Palembang. Some operations were flown from here, despite its aircraft being in a poor condition. The unit mounted a handful of attacks against the Japanese landing force in the Banka Strait on 14 February as it neared Sumatra, before evacuating to Kalidjati, in Java. Here, its surviving personnel were assimilated into other units and No 27 Sqn ceased to exist.

NORWEGIAN ACTION

Despite the traumas overseas, Blenheim fighters remained in use in Britain, and in April 1941 the Canadian-manned No 404 Sqn formed with Blenheim IVFs at Thorney Island. It soon moved from the south coast to Castletown, in northern Scotland, from where it flew operations off Norway.

Blenheim IF L4928/PT-E and other machines from No 27 Sqn were photographed at Kallang in April 1941. They were the first fighters to be sent to the RAF in the Far East, but they would soon be destroyed during the Japanese invasion of Malaya and Singapore (via D W Warne)



No 27 Sqn's Blenheim IF L8613/PT-F sits on trestles undergoing maintenance in late 1941 shortly before the Japanese invasion. Although the unit's pilots made some claims in their Blenheims during the early days of the Japanese invasion, all official records were lost in the chaos and precise details of their activities remain unknown (P H T Green collection)

In July Sam McHardy, now promoted to squadron leader, arrived to command 'B' Flight, and on 18 December the unit claimed its first victory when its CO, Wg Cdr P H Woodruff, navigator Flt Sgt Sims and wireless operator/gunner Plt Off Matthews (in Z5753) scrambled from Sumburgh and were credited with bringing down a reconnaissance Ju 88 50 miles east of the Shetlands. The write-up of this encounter for the squadron's scrapbook read as follows;

'CO and crew took off on interception of "Weather Willie". After about 15 minutes vectoring, the signal came through "Jerry at 'three o'clock"'. "Woody" carefully counted "1, 2, 3" from the head of the aircraft and altered course accordingly. A few seconds later the Ju 88 was seen by "Simmo" low down on the drink, which information was conveyed to "Woody" without delay. The latter pulled everything and dived into a three-quarter beam attack, getting in a long burst which upset the Ju 88 and caused him to turn to starboard, giving "Woody" another chance for a tail attack, with good results.'

The crew returned to Sumburgh, and it was not until the next day that they were told officially that the Ju 88 had in fact been shot down. It was the squadron's first aerial victory.

Soon afterwards, on 27 December, came a sterner test when No 404 Sqn's long-range fighter Blenheim IVFs from Sumburgh supported Operation *Archery* – the commando raid on Vaagso, in Norway. The aircraft flown by Plt Off E W Pierce and Sgt McCutcheon intercepted a trio of Bf 109s and gamely attacked them, claiming one probably destroyed, another damaged and one 'possible'! During the operation Sqn Ldr McHardy was embarked in the cruiser HMS *Kenya* as a fighter controller.

He was back in the cockpit on 15 January 1942 when he probably destroyed an He 115 seaplane that was encountered during a patrol (in Z6279). Fellow No 404 Sqn pilot Plt Off D H Inglis (in Z5736) had claimed an He 111 probable several hours earlier off Norway.

By then several more new units had received the Blenheim IVF, albeit temporarily, for coastal fighter duties. New Zealand-manned No 489 Sqn flew them from Thorney Island pending the arrival of Hampden I

No 143 Sqn was a short-lived user of the Blenheim IVF on coastal fighter duties when, perversely, the type replaced the unit's Beaufighters for the first nine months of 1942! One of the aircraft it was issued with during this period was T2131/HO-C. No 143 Sqn made only a few ASR searches with its Blenheim IVFs (via J D R Rawlings)



torpedo-bombers, whilst at Dyce, near Aberdeen, No 143 Sqn had also received them in place of Beaufighters! Neither unit saw any action with their Blenheim IVFs, unlike No 404 Sqn.

In a major operation on 16 May, six of the latter unit's Blenheim IVFs, led by Wg Cdr Woodruff, escorted a torpedo bomber attack on the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* as it steamed south off the Norwegian coast. Sqn Ldr McHardy (in Z5747) recalled;

'As we neared the enemy coast, there right ahead of us was the *Prinz Eugen* churning through the sea with a destroyer in every quarter in close attendance. The Beauforts went straight in, with us on their tails and, when the first aircraft were getting into range to drop, all hell was let loose as a huge barrage of anti-aircraft fire burst in the sky all around us. At this stage "Woody", who was leading, pulled up and the rest of us followed, and moments later we were locked in combat with Me 109s.

'In no time it seemed that "Woody" had one right on his tail. As I was behind the CO I managed to warn him over the radio, then press onto the tail of the '109. I couldn't fire because "Woody" was just ahead, but the '109 wasn't having anyone on his tail and pulled out and disappeared. We were expecting a really hot reception, but after flying madly about for a while trying to find a target, and at the same time keeping out of trouble, the Me 109s disappeared. It was getting dark when I reached Leuchars and I was one of the last to land.'

For his part in this operation Sam McHardy received a bar to his DFC and his CO, Wg Cdr Woodruff, a DFC – Flt Sgt Bell was awarded a DFM for engaging the Bf 109s. Of the 54 aircraft (27 Beauforts, six Blenheim IVs, eight Beaufighters and 13 Hudsons) involved in this mission, nine were lost. All the No 404 Sqn machines successfully returned to base, although Wg Cdr Woodruff's aircraft was badly shot up and his navigator, Flt Lt Fletcher, wounded in the leg.

Beaufighter IIFs began arriving at Sumburgh for No 404 Sqn in September 1942, allowing the unit to send its obsolete Blenheim fighters into honourable retirement. The last example left in January 1943.

The crew of Blenheim IVF Z6245/EE-L of No 404 Sqn prepare to take off from Dyce on the evening of 17 May 1942 to participate in the attack on the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* off Norway, when six aircraft from the unit provided fighter escort for Beaufort torpedo-bombers. One of the Blenheim IVFs involved in this hazardous mission was flown by Sqn Ldr Sam McHardy (Canadian Forces)



THE LAST RITES

Throughout early 1942 the Blenheims and Defiants that the RAF had fielded as makeshift nightfighters were gradually replaced. By the late spring only No 264 Sqn – the original Defiant unit – remained fully equipped and operational with the fighter, some of which were now fitted with the rudimentary AI Mk IV radar. This equipment was not overly effective, and the unit's only success with it came in the early hours of 18 April. At 0245 hrs Flg Off A I Stuart took off from West Malling in AA420, with Flg Off M H Maggs as his gunner. Whilst climbing away from their airfield they were told that enemy aircraft were approaching from the south, as the combat report described;

'Flg Off Stuart obtained a blip on his weapon (radar), which had been flashing for some time, showing an aircraft at 3000 ft range, dead ahead and slightly above. The Defiant was roughly due south of Beachy Head. He increased his speed, and after keeping the blip in the correct position for two to three minutes, the blip suddenly vanished. Simultaneously Flg Off Maggs saw an aircraft against the background of the sky about 300 ft above and 200 yards astern, slightly to port and overtaking.

'At that moment Flg Off Maggs clearly identified the aircraft as an He 111, which was by then 100 yards away. To make doubly sure of the identity of the enemy aircraft, Flg Off Maggs held his fire until it was within 50-75 yards, and then he fired a three-second burst right into its nose. Immediately, Flg Off Maggs saw the inside of the nose brilliantly lit up by the explosion of the de Wilde ammunition. These explosions were also observed by Flg Off Stuart, who had glanced behind. The enemy aircraft wobbled and Flg Off Maggs fired a further burst of about two seconds duration into the nose. Again, brilliant explosions were seen within the nose, lighting up the whole contour of the enemy aircraft, which immediately afterwards wobbled violently and fell onto its back. The bomber went down into a vertical dive out of control, and it was last spotted by Flg Off Maggs after he had seen it falling for about 200 ft into the thick haze below.

'This combat occurred at approx 0245 hrs at about 11,200 ft.'

Stuart's victory was No 264 Sqn's 97th overall, and its 15th at night. More significantly, however, it was also the Defiant's final victory. This success was very much a swansong for the Boulton Paul fighter, as it was now being rapidly phased out. Although No 96 Sqn had only received its first Defiant IIs in early April as replacements for the unit's Mk IAs, these lasted just weeks, as Sqn Ldr Dickie Haine noted;

'News arrived in late April that we were to get Beaufighters. Eight gunners were posted the next day, with the first Beaufighter being delivered on 2 May.'

By the time the Defiant II entered service, most squadrons were being re-equipped with more suitable types. However, it was a radar-equipped Mk II that achieved the Defiant's final victory in April 1942 (S Walker)





One of the few Turbinlite Havoc pilots to make an aerial claim was Sqn Ldr Charles Winn of No 1459 Flight, who was able to assist his 'parasite' Hurricane sufficiently enough to allow the pilot of the latter to probably destroy a bomber on 27 July 1942 (*Don Aris*)

No 1459 Flight Turbinlite Havoc AH470/F was routinely flown by Charles Winn from Hibaldstow in 1942. It was also flown by the unit's very distinguished CO, Sqn Ldr James Nicholson VC (*via J D Oughton*)

On 30 April No 264 Sqn moved to Colerne, where, on 3 May, its first Mosquito IIs arrived. The unit's air gunners were also posted away and their places taken by radio observers (navigators).

Although in addition to the Beaufighter, the superb Mosquito was now beginning to reach nightfighter squadrons, Havocs remained active throughout the summer of 1942 – including Turbinlite units such as No 1459 Flight. During the early hours of 29 July, its CO, Sqn Ldr Charles Winn (flying with Plt Off Scott), had one of the unit's few encounters with the Luftwaffe, as Winn described;

'We scrambled some time after midnight and were handed over to GCI, after which we joined up with our Hurricane that was being flown by John Ellacombe. We charged at one "bogey", but this turned out to be friendly. We were at about 10,000 ft when Scott gained a contact and I got a visual on a Dornier off to the left, and soon afterwards our Hurricane also got a visual.

'A dogfight then ensued in which the Dornier twisted and turned between the Hurricane and the Havoc by taking violent evasive action. The Hurricane fired a short burst, receiving three bursts of return fire from the rear top turret, which was then put out of action by a deflection shot. The Hurricane then closed on a port beam attack, firing long burst at 40 yards – hits were easily seen on the fuselage and wings. By then Ellacombe was out of ammunition and we, of course, had no weapons at all, but we saw the Dornier in a vertical dive until it was lost in haze at 4000 ft. We claimed it probably destroyed – one of the few we had.'

Shortly afterwards No 1459 Flight's Plt Off Gunn and his Hurricane 'parasite' engaged another Do 217 and claimed to have damaged it.

Later that same day (29 July), No 85 Sqn – the only Havoc nightfighter unit – received its first Mosquito II. However, it was while flying a Havoc the following night that the CO, Wg Cdr Gordon Raphael, still paired up with the now WO Nat Addison, took off for a patrol under Easthill GCI. After being vectored towards a 'bandit' at 9000 ft, Addison gained AI contact and Raphael closed, eventually picking up the dim shape of a Ju 88. Closing to 50 yards, he opened fire with two bursts, which caused the enemy to dive away vertically and crash. The aircraft, from 12./KG 77, was subsequently claimed by anti-aircraft gunners, so the Havoc crew was only awarded a 'damaged'.



Raphael enjoyed better luck in the early hours of 3 August when he used a Havoc to attack a Ju 88, although in the gloom he identified his target as a Dornier. His combat report noted;

‘Contact was made with the enemy aircraft at 14,000 ft east of Bradwell, closing in to about 150 yards range down moon and at a height of 13,000 ft. Pilot identified the aircraft from its exhausts as a Do 217. At 0242 hrs the pilot drew in to less than 100 yards range and from astern gave the contact a five-second burst. There was an explosion and the port engine caught fire. Pieces began to fly off and the enemy aircraft turned steeply to port, going down in flames and being seen burning on the water in the region of Dengie Flats.’

This was Raphael’s sixth, and last, victory with the Havoc. That night future ace Plt Off Nigel Bunting also intercepted a Dornier, but to his intense frustration he could not catch it, despite clocking more than 300 mph in his Havoc!

Although No 85 Sqn was now largely re-equipped with Mosquitoes, it was in a Havoc on the night of 7 September on a clear night off Foulness that Canadian Sgt K R McCormick and his radar operator Sgt W Nixon were in action. Their combat report recounted the Havoc’s final victory in the nightfighter role with the RAF;

‘We took off from Hunsdon at 2102 hrs and landed at 2355 hrs. Contact was first made flying at 13,000 ft and at a range of 7000 ft owing to jamming. There was no indication on the elevation tube, but indication on the direction was hard to starboard. The enemy aircraft turned to starboard and took evasive action by weaving five degrees to both starboard and port. The Havoc was now at 10,000 ft against bright starlight, and from the exhausts and dihedral we identified the enemy aircraft as a Ju 88.

‘We closed to 150 ft and fired at the starboard engine. There was a flash and the Havoc was bumped up by the enemy aircraft’s slipstream. It was then seen burning on the sea. Pilot orbited and called for a fix. Both pilot and operator are emphatic that there was no anti-aircraft fire, and no return fire was experienced. The burning enemy aircraft was seen by coastguards and wreckage was later seen on the edge of a sandbank.’

McCormick’s burst from his eight machine guns had used more than 1500 rounds to bring down He 111H-6 ‘6N+ER’ of 15./KG 6, which crashed on Buxey Sands, in Essex, killing Oberleutnant H Müller and his crew. This was also the last He 111 to fall onto English soil.

And with that the baton was very firmly passed on to the new generation of RAF nightfighters.

PACIFIC FINALE

In Britain, Nos 418 and 605 Sqns continued to fly Boston IIIs in the intruder role through to the late summer of 1943, and overseas a handful of aces continued to be associated with the enduring Douglas twin in combat.

On 4 December 1942 Wg Cdr Keith Hampshire took command of No 22 Sqn RAAF, flying Boston IIIs in the attack role in New Guinea. In March he led his squadron’s participation during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, when, during attacks on enemy shipping on the 3rd, A6M Zero-sen fighters appeared. ‘Four “Zekes” commenced individual attacks

The final Havoc victory by an ace was claimed by 2Lt Burnell William Adams of the 6th NFS's Det A on 15 May 1943 when he and his crew shot down a G4M 'Betty' bomber off Port Moresby. This distinctively marked P-70, christened *Dusty*, served with Det A at that time (F Second)

from the rear. They fired short bursts and then broke away when fired on, all the "Zekes" failing to press home their attacks'.

The battle was a resounding victory for the Allies, and for his part Hampshire received the DSO. Later in the year he was posted to England to command No 456 Sqn, with which he became a seven-victory nightfighter ace.

It was over New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific that the USAAF also fielded Douglas A-20s that had been modified for nightfighting as P-70 Havocs. They were flown by the 6th Night Fighting Squadron, which had detachments based throughout the area. From one of these early in the morning of 19 April 1943, Capt Earl C Bennett and TSgt Ray Mooney (radar operator) made the P-70's first claim when they destroyed a twin-engined G4M 'Betty' bomber of the Imperial Japanese Navy over Tulagi, in the Solomon Islands. Almost a month later, on 15 May, 2Lt Burnell W Adams and his radar operator Flt Off Paul Di Labbio were scrambled in a P-70 from Port Moresby, in New Guinea. Shortly after 2000 hrs they found a pair of G4M 'Bettys' 35 miles northwest of their airfield. Adams closed on one and opened fire;

'I pressed the trigger on the 0.50-cal machine guns so as to get the range of the target. Once I saw the tracers hitting the ship I gave him a good burst with the 20 mm cannon. I did this twice, pulling the nose back on the enemy ship, and the second time a flame burst out from between the engine and fuselage on the left side. It was a damn good feeling and a hell of a swell sight to see. The fire was spreading and the Nip bomber began to spin, and a few seconds after entering the clouds it exploded.'

This was Adams' only victory with the P-70, but he later went on to achieve aceship flying the P-38 Lightning. The final comment in his combat report probably reflected the plea from all the Defiant, Blenheim and Havoc crews that had been flying these makeshift nightfighters;

'Give us better aeroplanes and equipment – and bring us more Japs!' The fighting days of these machines were now over.



APPENDICES

Aces with Defiant, Blenheim and Havoc Claims

Name	Service	Type	Unit/s	D/B/H Claims	Total Claims	Theatre
Thorn E R	RAF	D	264	12+1sh/-/2	12+1sh/-/2	UK
Young M H	RAF	D	264	7+6sh/-/-	7+6sh/-/3	UK
Cooke N G	RAF	D	264	9+3sh/-/-	9+3sh/-/-	UK
Hunter P A	RAF	B	254	nil	9/+1sh/-/-	UK
		D	264	9+1sh/-/-		
Hackwood G H	RAF	D	264	4+4sh/-/-	4+4sh/-/-	UK
Barwell E G	RAF	D	264/125	7/1/-	9/1/1	UK
Welsh T D	RAF	D	264/125	6+1sh/-/1	6+1sh/-/1	UK
Raphael G L	RAF	D	96	nil	7/1/1	UK
		H	85	6/1/1		
Whitley D	RAF	D	264	4+2sh/1/-	4+2sh/1/-	UK
Hughes F D	RAF	D	264	5/1/1	18+1sh/1/1	UK
Peacock R J	RAF	B	235	3+2sh/-/	1sh 3+2sh/-/1sh	UK
Verity V B S	RAF	D	96	4/2/-	8+1sh/3/4+1sh	UK
Hoare B R O'B	RAF	B	23	1/1/-	9/3/8	UK
		H	23	2/1/4		
Deanesly E C	RAF	D	256	4/-/-	4+2sh/-/-	UK
Ensor P S B	RAF	B	23/229	2/1/1	5/3/3	UK
		H	23	3/2/2		
McMullen D A P	RAF	D	151	3/-/-	17+5sh/6/1	UK
Trousdale R M	RAF	D	255	3/-/-	7+1sh/2/1	UK
Herrick M J	RAF	B	25	3/-/-	6+2sh/-/2	UK
Bodien H E	RAF	D	151	3/-/-	5/-/-	UK
Howitt G L	RAF	H	85	2/-/1	6/1/1	UK
Davidson R T P	RAF	B	30	1+1sh/1/-	4+2sh/2/2	ME
Wagner A D	RAF	D	151	1/-/2	10/-/5	UK
Walker D R	RAF	B	30	1+1sh/-/2	4+2sh/-/2+1sh	ME
Smith I S	RAF	D	151	1/-/1	8/1/4	UK
Braham J R D	RAF	B	29	1/-/-	29/2/5	UK
Topham J G	RAF	B	219	1/-/-	13/1/1	UK
Benson J G	RAF	D	141	1/-/-	10/-/4	UK
Inniss A R D	RAF	B	236	1/-/-	8+1sh/-/-	UK
Kendall P S	RAF	D	255	1/-/-	8/1/2	UK
Coleman G B S	RAF	D	256	1/-/-	7/1/1	UK
Adams B W	USAAF	H	6 NFS	1/-/-	7/-/-	New Guinea
Tamblyn H N	RAF	D	141	1/-/-	5+1sh/1/2	UK
Haine R C*	RAF	B	25/600/68	1/-/-	5?/-/-	UK
		D	96	nil		
Crew E D	RAF	B	604	1sh/-/-	12+1sh/-/5	UK
O'Brien J S	RAF	B	23	1sh/-/-	3+2sh/1/-	UK
Sanders J G	RAF	D	255	-/1/1	16/1/1	UK
Townsend P W	RAF	H	85	-/1/1	9+2sh/2/2	UK
Burbridge B A	RAF	H	85	-/1/-	21/2/1	UK
Gracie E J	RAF	B	23	-/1/-	7+3sh/5/6	UK

Bunting N E	RAF	H	85	-/1/-	9/1/2	UK
Burke P L	RAF	B	25	nil	5/1/+1sh	UK
		H	93/537	-/1/-		
Hayley-Bell D*	RAF	H	93	-/1/-	37/1/2	UK
Hodgkinson A J	RAF	B	219	-/-/2	12/1/5	UK
Melville-Jackson G H	RAF	B	236	-/-/1	2+3sh/-/1	UK
Bailey J R A	RAF	D	264/125	-/-/1	6/-/2	UK
		H	85/1452 Flt	nil		
Boyd A D McN	RAF	B	600	-/-/1	10/-/1	UK

Key

D – Defiant

B – Blenheim

H – Havoc and Boston

Note

Those pilots with less than five victories are marked thus * and are shown because of their inclusion in *Aces High* or *Those Other Eagles*, and where there may be doubt as to their actual scores

COLOUR PLATES

1**Blenheim IF L8715/NG-R of Flg Off J Cunningham, No 604 'County of Middlesex' Sqn, North Weald, December 1939**

Flg Off John Cunningham, who was to become possibly the most famous Allied nightfighter pilot of World War 2, was a pre-war member of No 604 Sqn. Mobilised just before the start of the conflict, he flew Blenheim IFs with the squadron, including L8715/NG-R. Cunningham's first operational missions were undertaken in December 1939, and he flew regularly thereafter with Sgt 'Jimmy' Rawnsley, although he made no claims with the Blenheim. This aircraft was also regularly flown throughout the summer months of 1940 by another successful nightfighter pilot, Plt Off Ian Joll, who was credited with at least four victories.

2**Blenheim IF L8726/FK-M of Plt Off J G Topham, No 219 Sqn, Catterick, February 1940**

Yorkshire-based No 219 Sqn had a number of future aces in its ranks during its period with Blenheims, including Plt Off Johnny Topham who was posted in directly from training. He first flew L8726 on a night patrol off West Hartlepool on 21 February 1940, and thereafter regularly on both day and night patrols. Topham was in another Blenheim, however, when, on the afternoon of 15 August, he intercepted a raid off the northeast coast and probably destroyed a Ju 88 – this proved to be his only Blenheim claim. L8726 was later transferred to training duties, serving until 1943.

3**Blenheim IF L8723/RE-A of Plt Off R R Smith, No 229 Sqn, Digby, February-March 1940**

No 229 Sqn was one of a number of newly formed fighter squadrons to temporarily fly the Blenheim IF, and with which a number of future aces began their careers. Among them was Canadian Plt Off Robert Smith, who was to score 7.5 victories in the Battle of Britain and over the Western Desert. He first flew this aircraft on 17 February on an RDF trial and then several more times until No 229 Sqn

re-equipped with Hurricane Is. Other future aces who also flew L8723 during the winter months of 1939-40 were Plt Off Victor Verity, a New Zealander, and Plt Off Ron Bary, who performed an uneventful trawler patrol from Digby with the aircraft at the end of February, AC Jeffcott accompanying him as his gunner.

4**Blenheim IF L1373/RO-J of Plt Off J R D Braham, No 29 Sqn, Debden, March 1940**

With 29 victories, Bob Braham was the RAF's most successful pilot on twin-engined fighters. Joining No 29 Sqn before the start of World War 2, he twice flew convoy patrols in this aircraft on 7 March 1940, when it was noted, 'Airborne 0645 hrs for convoy patrol. No enemy aircraft seen, 1.45 hours duration. Later in the day the same three conducted a patrol of Smith's Knoll lightship, again without event'. These were Braham's last sorties in L1373, however, as a week later it crash landed at Debden and was written off. Braham claimed his first victory, and only one in a Blenheim, on 24/25 August 1940 while flying L1463.

5**Defiant I L6973/PS-A of Sqn Ldr P A Hunter, No 264 Sqn, Duxford, May 1940**

Defiant L6973 was the personal aircraft of the dynamic CO of No 264 Sqn, Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter, throughout the intense period of fighting experienced by the unit over France and Holland in May. He was flying this machine on the 12th when he led two sections on a patrol with Spitfires off the Hague. His gunner, Sgt F H King, downed a Ju 88 with a cross-over attack during the course of the flight, thus claiming the Defiant's first victory. Hunter is believed to have flown this aircraft throughout the Dunkirk evacuation, when No 264 Sqn was credited with an astonishing run of success that saw the CO take his personal score to 9.5 victories. By the time he led his squadron into the Battle of Britain Hunter had been allocated N1535, and he and King perished in this machine on 24 August 1940.

6

Defiant I L6957/PS-T of Plt Off T D Welsh, No 264 Sqn, Manston, 25 May 1940

On 25 May Plt Off Terry Welsh flew two patrols off the French coast between Boulogne and Dunkirk, the second of which was in L6957. In marked contrast to subsequent days, the Luftwaffe was not seen on either sortie. Over the next few days several other future aces flew the aircraft too, while Welsh, in another Defiant, claimed the first of his seven victories on the 27th. In an action two days later, L6957, then flown by Plt Off Desmond Kay, was badly damaged. Repaired, the fighter flew with No 264 Sqn during the Battle of Britain, when it was used on occasion by ace Plt Off Eric Barwell. L6957 was damaged again on 28 August, shortly before the squadron was withdrawn from No 11 Group, and following repairs it was transferred to a training unit.

7

Blenheim IF L8680/NG-Q of Plt Off I K S Joll, No 604 'County of Middlesex' Sqn, Manston, June 1940

L8680 was flown by Plt Off Ian Joll in June 1940, although from mid November 1939 through to late July it was actually the regular mount of Flg Off John Cunningham. The latter flew the fighter for the last time on 20 July during an uneventful night patrol. When No 604 Sqn was re-equipped with Beaufighter IFs, L8680 was passed on to newly formed No 68 Sqn. The fighter served with the unit until it was eventually lost in a crash in November 1941. Ian Joll went on to claim at least four victories in Beaufighters.

8

Blenheim IF L8679/BQ-D of Plt Off A D McN Boyd, No 600 'City of London' Sqn, Manston, July 1940

Oxford graduate Plt Off Archie Boyd, who was later to achieve ace status, joined No 600 Sqn in May 1940. He first flew L8679 on the night of 1 July when he conducted an AI radar test in the aircraft. Boyd's first operational sortie in it came four nights later when he and radar operator Plt Off Frost flew an uneventful night patrol in the early hours of 5 July. This was also Boyd's last flight in L8679, as during a night patrol off Westgate, Kent, on the 9th it suffered an engine failure, forcing the crew to bail out – they were rescued from the sea. Boyd went on to have a successful nightfighting career with No 600 Sqn.

9

Defiant I L7013/PS-U of Plt Off E G Barwell, No 264 Sqn, Fowlmere, 12 July 1940

By mid July 1940 No 264 Sqn was flying sorties from Duxford's satellite at Fowlmere, from where on the 12th five-victory ace Plt Off Eric Barwell, with Sgt Martin as his gunner, flew a night patrol in L7013. Soon afterwards the squadron moved south to Hornchurch, and it was from here on the morning of 24 August that L7013 was taken aloft by Flt Lt E W Campbell-Colquhoun. He was subsequently attacked by two Bf 109s and the Defiant hit just behind the turret by an explosive shell, which ignited the Vey cartridges. By taking evasive action Campbell-Colquhoun managed to shake off his attackers before returning without further damage to Manston. L7013, which wore a non-standard roundel, was repaired and then passed on to a training unit.

10

Defiant I N1564/TW-T of Flg Off H N Tamblyn, No 141 Sqn, Prestwick, July 1940

Having been decimated in a single action on 19 July 1940 and withdrawn to Scotland to rebuild, No 141 Sqn flew a number of Defiants from Prestwick, including N1564. On 28 July it was flown from the South Ayrshire airfield on a patrol of the southwest Scottish coast by Plt Off Hugh Tamblyn, who had survived the carnage off Dover. Indeed, his gunner, Sgt S W N Powell, had claimed No 141 Sqn's first victory (a Bf 109E) during the 19 July debacle, setting himself on the path to aceship. Two nights later he was again at the controls of N1764 when he flew a patrol off May Island with Sgt McGuigan as gunner. Soon afterwards Hamblyn transferred to Hurricane I-equipped No 242 Sqn, and he was lost on 3 April 1941. In contrast, N1564 survived until 1944.

11

Blenheim IVF L9446/LA-N of Flg Off R G Peacock, No 235 Sqn, Thorney Island, 18 August 1940

The only pilot to achieve five victories flying the Blenheim fighter was Flg Off Reg Peacock, who gained his first successes during North Sea patrols in May and June 1940 – by mid summer he had two and two shared victories to his name. With the Battle of Britain at its height, a detachment of No 235 Sqn's Blenheim IVFs was moved to Thorney Island for local defence, Reg Peacock being one of the pilots to accompany the aircraft. On the afternoon of 18 August he scrambled in L9446, leading two other Blenheim IVFs into action against a raid by almost 30 Ju 87s. Flying straight at the Stukas, Peacock closed with the leader and opened fire. He had the satisfaction of seeing his target crash into the sea with its engine ablaze, thus giving him his fifth victory. L9446 was the usual aircraft of Sqn Ldr A W Fletcher, and it went on to enjoy a lengthy career in training units, unlike Reg Peacock, who was killed in an accident in Libya on 5 February 1943.

12

Defiant I L7021/PS-H of Plt Off D Whitley, No 264 Sqn, Hornchurch, 24 August 1940

'Bull' Whitley joined No 264 Sqn soon after it had formed, and he was credited with five victories during the unit's successful engagements over Dunkirk. He remained with the squadron into the summer, flying L7021 for the first time in early August. Later in the month he moved with L7021 to Hornchurch, from where on the 24th he scrambled in the fighter with Sgt R C Turner (his gunner throughout his time with No 264 Sqn) against an incoming raid. Over Ramsgate they attacked and shot down a Ju 88, which became Whitley's final victory. Four days later, in No 264 Sqn's last daylight engagement, he and Turner were shot down and killed in N1574 over Thanet by a Bf 109 of JG 26. In the same action L7021, flown by Sqn Ldr G D Garvin, was also shot down. Both Garvin and his gunner, Flt Lt R C V Ash, bailed out, but the latter perished.

13

Defiant I L7026/PS-V of Plt Off E G Barwell, No 264 Sqn, Hornchurch, 24 August 1940

Plt Off Eric Barwell was flying this aircraft on 24 August when he was scrambled from Hornchurch against an incoming raid.

The Defiants that had taken off were unable to join up, and in the disjointed combat that followed Barwell shot down an 'He 113' (actually a Bf 109) for his sixth (and final) day victory. L7026 was flown by Defiant ace Plt Off Gerald Hackwood the following day, and it was in action again on the 26th when its crew claimed to have damaged a Do 17. However, on No 264 Sqn's day of reckoning – 28 August – the fighter was shot down and the crew (Plt Offs P L Kenner and C E Johnson) killed in the same fight over Thanet that saw the death of 'Bull' Whitley and his gunner Sgt R C Turner.

14

Defiant I L7005/PS-X of Sgt E R Thorn, No 264 Sqn, Hornchurch, 26 August 1940

L7005 was the most successful Defiant of them all, with its crews being credited with 11 and three shared victories. In its final combat on 26 August, the fighter was flown by the most successful of all Defiant crews – Sgts Ted Thorn and Fred Barker – who scrambled from Hornchurch in the fighter. Between Herne Bay and Deal they intercepted a formation of Do 17s, and in converging attacks shot down two of them. However, they were then attacked by the escorting Bf 109s and the Defiant badly damaged. As Thorn prepared to make a crash landing near Herne Bay, a Messerschmitt closed in to finish L7005 off, only for Barker to down it too using his remaining ammunition.

15

Blenheim IVF L9237/NT-J of Plt Off A Watson, No 203 Sqn, Khormaksar, Aden, August-December 1940

Future eight-victory ace Plt Off Anthony Watson first flew L9237 on 5 August 1940 when he conducted fighter patrols over the Red Sea from Kamaran Island. He subsequently flew it on numerous occasions through to December, as did several other notable pilots including Flt Lt Jimmie Pike, who was to destroy more than a dozen enemy aircraft on the ground flying Blenheim IVFs during the next few months. Watson last flew L9237 on 18 December, when he mounted an escort to shipping in the Gulf of Aden. The aircraft later moved with No 203 Sqn to Egypt, and it became part of the detachment sent to Crete on 25 April 1941. L9237 was lost in combat with German fighters two days later, although its crew may have damaged a Bf 110 immediately prior to its demise.

16

Defiant I L7018/PS-O of Plt Off G H Hackwood, No 264 Sqn, Kirton-in-Lindsey, 7 October 1940

After its mauling in August, No 264 Sqn was withdrawn north to Lincolnshire and given the less onerous task of convoy protection. Among the aircraft that survived the unit's time in No 11 Group was L7018, which is depicted here wearing the standard day fighter colour scheme for the period. By October No 264 Sqn had switched to night defence work, and among the aces that remained with the unit was Plt Off Gerald Hackwood, who achieved all his victories over Dunkirk. He was at the controls of L7018 when it crashed while taking off from Luton for a patrol on 7 October. Although Hackwood survived on this occasion, he was killed when N1626 crashed whilst taking off from Southend on a night interception sortie on 20 November.

17

Defiant I N1801/PS-Y of Plt Off F D Hughes, No 264 Sqn, Debden, Gravesend and Biggin Hill, December 1940 to April 1941

N1801 was the regular mount of Plt Off Desmond Hughes, who was to become one of the RAF's most successful nightfighters. He and his gunner, Sgt Fred Gash, first flew this aircraft during a night patrol on 21 December, and they were to use it regularly until the following spring. On the night of 12 March 1941 they were flying it when they shot down an He 111 of 2./KG 55 near Dorking. They were also in the fighter when they attacked and probably destroyed another Heinkel on 8 April. Two nights later Hughes and Gash were flying N1801 once more when, off the Isle of Wight, they shot down He 111 '6N+HL' of KG 100, its demise making Hughes an ace.

18

Defiant I N1752/TW-L of Plt Off J G Benson, No 141 Sqn, Gravesend, 11 December 1940

'Ben' Benson, who joined No 141 Sqn during the Battle of Britain, converted to nightfighting with the unit in October 1940. Having moved south to form part of London's night defences, he flew regular patrols in N1752 from 11 December. With Plt Off Blair as his gunner, Benson also undertook intruder missions to Abbeville, in northern France. A few days prior to Benson's first flight in N1752, another successful pilot, Plt Off Noel Constantine (with Sgt Coxon as his gunner), had an inconclusive encounter with a German bomber in this aircraft. Following its service with No 141 Sqn, N1752 performed gunnery training duties until 1943.

19

Defiant I N3313/PS-P of Sqn Ldr P J Sanders, No 264 Sqn, Debden and Biggin Hill, December 1940 to February 1941

N3313 was the regular mount of Battle of Britain Spitfire ace Sqn Ldr Philip Sanders, who, although on the staff at HQ No 11 Group, regularly flew as a supernumerary squadron leader with No 264 Sqn until succeeding his namesake, A T D 'Scruffy' Sanders, as CO in June 1941. He initially flew this aircraft operationally on 1 December 1940, N3313 also being occasionally flown by some of the squadron's other successful pilots including the 'ace' crew of Flg Off Desmond Hughes and Sgt Fred Gash. They mounted a lengthy, though uneventful, night patrol in N3313 during the early hours of 6 May. Unusually, the fighter has a yellow surround to the toned down fuselage roundels, but retains the white of the fin flash!

20

Defiant I N3333/YD-B of Flt Lt R M Trousdale, No 255 Sqn, Kirton-in-Lindsey, December 1940 to February 1941

New Zealander Richard Trousdale joined No 255 Sqn when it formed, having previously claimed several victories in Spitfires with No 266 Sqn. N3333 was delivered to No 255 Sqn in November 1940 wearing day fighter camouflage, and in this scheme it was flown by Trousdale to Cranwell for a display of fighter aircraft in December. He flew it occasionally thereafter, by which time N3333 was probably wearing nightfighter colours. The Defiant was likely thus finished when, on 7 March 1941, Plt Off Balantyne used it to engage

an He 111 in poor weather. Trousdale became an ace whilst flying a Defiant two months later.

21

Defiant I N3328/DZ-Z of Sgt H E Bodien, No 151 Sqn, Wittering, 26 February 1941

This aircraft was very unusual as it was adorned with a distinctive marking in the form of a sharksmouth, the origin of which remains unknown. N3328 was first flown by future ace Henry Bodien at the end of February 1941 when he and gunner Sgt Jonas conducted a night flying test before going onto standby. Bodien had achieved his first victory earlier in the month. The fighter was also flown on occasion by WO James Hopewell, who had become an ace flying Spitfires the previous summer. Like many other Defiants, N3328 later served in a training role. The fighter was written off in a crash in Yorkshire in October 1942.

22

Defiant I N3377/PS-J of Flg Off M H Young, No 264 Sqn, Biggin Hill and West Malling, February to May 1941

Michael Young, who had claimed 12 victories flying Defiants in the day fighter role in 1940, remained with No 264 Sqn when it switched to nightfighting. He and regular gunner Sgt Leslie Russell flew through the winter *Blitz*, taking N3377 aloft for the first time on 28 February 1941. It became their preferred mount throughout the spring, and on 9 May they flew the fighter on an intruder sortie to northern France. Whilst circling over Merville airfield they engaged a Bf 110 and shot it down. This proved to be Young's final success, but with 13 victories (six of which were shared) to his name, he was one of the most successful Defiant pilots. Young survived the war, but Russell was later killed flying with Bomber Command.

23

Blenheim IF K7179/VT-B of Flg Off R T P Davidson, No 30 Sqn, Eleusis, Greece, March-April 1941

In June 1940 some of No 30 Sqn's Blenheim I bombers were modified into Mk IF fighters following Italy's declaration of war against the Allies. These aircraft were sent to Greece later in the year, where future ace Bob Davidson was to make several claims in them. On 18 March 1941 he flew K7179 in an attack on Valona airfield that left four Ro.37bis damaged. Six days later, when five Blenheim fighters left Heraklion, in Crete, to attack airfields in the Dodecanese, Bob Davidson was again at the controls of K7179, leading a pair of fighters in strafing runs against targets on the island of Scarpanto. In mid April No 30 Sqn was transferred to Crete, and on the 27th Davidson, again flying this aircraft, led Plt Off Innes-Smith as they provided fighter cover for the merchant vessels *Dilwara*, *City of London* and *Costa Rica* as they evacuated troops from Greece.

24

Defiant I N1744/JT-S of Plt Off D L Hughes, No 256 Sqn, Squires Gate, April-May 1941

Future Mosquito ace Dennis Hughes, with his gunner Sgt Deane, regularly flew this aircraft during the final weeks of the night *Blitz* in the late spring of 1941, firstly on the night of 9/10 April. Although Hughes had experienced no success

in the Defiant, during another patrol on the night of 3/4 May he had two fleeting contacts with enemy bombers over the northwest of England. Finished in matt sooty black, N1744 displayed a worn and rather scruffy appearance as the rough finished paint absorbed all manner of dirt and oil, undoubtedly to the detriment of its performance.

25

Defiant I N1770/JT-U of Flt Lt E C Deanesly, No 256 Sqn, Squires Gate, 10 April 1941

Defiant N1770 originally entered service with No 255 Sqn, and it was flown in the early months of 1941 by future New Zealand nightfighter aces Flt Lt Richard Trousdale and Flg Off Gil Hayton. In the spring the aircraft was transferred to No 256 Sqn, and on the evening of 9 April it was flown on an uneventful patrol by Flt Lt Christopher Deanesly and gunner Sgt Scott. However, the following night over Warwickshire, they used N1770 to shoot down He 111H-5 wk-nr 3623/ '1H+FS' of 8./KG 26, which had been sent to bomb Coventry, Scott's fire causing the bomber to break up and crash at 2235 hrs. It was Deanesly's first night success, and he went on to achieve aceship three weeks later.

26

Havoc I BJ461/VY-Y of Wg Cdr P W Townsend, No 85 Sqn, Debden, April 1941

Havoc BJ461 was the usual mount of Plt Off Geoffrey Goodman, who was to make a total of eight claims, including four destroyed. It was also flown on occasion by other significant pilots in No 85 Sqn including the CO, Wg Cdr Peter Townsend, who undertook a night patrol in the aircraft on 11 April 1941. Future Mosquito ace Plt Off Nigel Bunting also regularly flew BJ461 between May and August, but he was flying another aircraft when he made his only Havoc claim – an He 111 probable on 23/24 June. BJ461 was later converted into Turbinlite configuration and saw further service until early 1943.

27

Blenheim IVF Z5722/WM-Z of Wg Cdr the Hon J W M Aitken, No 68 Sqn, High Ercall, April-May 1941

Z5722 was unusual as it was a standard radarless Blenheim IVF in a nightfighter unit. Indeed, most of No 68 Sqn's interim equipment at this time consisted of Blenheim IFs. The fighter became the usual mount of the CO and Battle of Britain ace, Wg Cdr Max Aitken, who flew occasional operational patrols in it – for example on 4 May, with Sgt Lawson as his navigator. Five days later Z5722 was also flown by another notable pilot, Sqn Ldr Dickie Haine, while future Australian ace Plt Off Mervyn Shippard also logged time at the aircraft's controls.

28

Havoc I BT465/HN-F of Flt Lt P L Burke, No 93 Sqn, Middle Wallop, April-May 1941

No 93 Sqn was formed to exploit and develop the concept of laying aerial minefields ahead of German bomber streams, the unit being equipped with modified Havocs. Although the idea proved to be unsuccessful, one exponent who did make some claims using the mines was future ace Flt Lt Pat Burke. He flew this aircraft, which carried the name *FRANCES* on its

nose, on a patrol on the night of 7 April. Burke was also flying it two nights later when he laid a minefield and was credited with an He 111 probable. BT465 continued to be his regular mount through April and May, and it was also being flown by Flt Lt George MacLannahan when he was credited with an He 111 destroyed at the end of the latter month.

29

Havoc I BD121/YP-F of Flg Off P S B Ensor, No 23 Sqn, Ford, May 1941

BD121, which served exclusively with No 23 Sqn, was often flown in May 1941 by Flg Off Philip Ensor, who was one of the RAF's top intruder pilots of the early war years. On the 6th, with Sgts Morris and Campbell as crew, he performed a night offensive patrol in it. However, unlike many of his other sorties that week, Ensor made no claims. On the night of 10 May he intruded to Beauvais in BD121, where he stalked a Ju 88 near the airfield and shot it down, so taking the 21-year-old to acedem. Sadly, Ensor was killed just a few months later during an intruder mission to Lannion airfield, in France, in BB905. BD121 was also flown on occasion by future Rhodesian ace Sgt Ernest Williams, and it was later transferred to the Royal Navy for training duties.

30

Defiant I T3937/KP-S of Plt Off N S Head, No 409 Sqn RCAF, Coleby Grange, July to September 1941

After training, Norman Head joined Canadian-manned No 409 Sqn, where he flew the Defiant until the unit's conversion to the Beaufighter. He made his first flight in this aircraft on 24 July, conducting a nightfighter patrol, with Sgt Collins as his gunner. In mid August, shortly after No 409 Sqn was declared fully operational, Head was attacked on two consecutive nights by Ju 88 intruders from II./NJG 2 when taking off from Coleby Grange. He last flew T3937 on 26 September when he undertook two searchlight cooperation sorties. Later in the war Head was to claim four victories and seven V1s destroyed, the latter making him a 'Diver' ace. T3937 was later transferred to No 153 Sqn and eventually scrapped in 1943.

31

Defiant I V1123/RA-R of Plt Off R G Woodman, No 410 Sqn RCAF, Drem, August-September 1941

Following training in Canada, Englishman 'Tim' Woodman joined No 410 Sqn RCAF, where for a brief period he flew the Defiant until converting with the unit to Beaufighters. He first flew V1123 on an air test on 26 August, and then several times in September with his regular air gunner, Sgt Bowman. V1123 was later converted into a target tug and survived the war.

32

Havoc I BD112/YP-T of Sqn Ldr B R O'B Hoare, No 23 Sqn, Ford, October 1941

'Sammy' Hoare was one of the RAF's great characters, and he also became one of its most successful intruder pilots. Making regular claims through the spring and summer of 1941, Hoare flew BD112 for the first time on 23 October in company with Sgts Sherrington and Fletcher as crew. He later became No 23 Sqn's CO, and supervised its conversion

to the Mosquito, achieving acedem with the fighter. BD112 was later passed onto a training unit and eventually became a ground instructional airframe.

33

Defiant I N1636/VA-M of Plt Off G E Jameson RNZAF, No 125 'Newfoundland' Sqn, Fairwood Common, 18 January 1942

The leading RNZAF nightfighter ace, 'Jamie' Jameson began his frontline career with the Defiant on No 125 Sqn, although he made no claims flying the aircraft. On 18 January he flew this machine, with Sgt Blackmore as gunner, on an operational night patrol lasting 90 minutes that proved uneventful. This aircraft was the usual mount of Sgt Simcock, and when No 125 Sqn was re-equipped N1636 joined an air gunnery school. It remained employed in this role until the fighter was scrapped in late 1944.

34

Defiant II AA583/ZJ-M of Sqn Ldr R C Haine, No 96 Sqn, Wrexham, April to June 1942

Sqn Ldr Dickie Haine flew operationally throughout World War 2, assuming command of the Defiant equipped No 96 Sqn at the end of 1941. In the spring of 1942 the unit began to receive radar-equipped Defiant IIs, and AA583 briefly became his personal mount – Haine's aircraft were always marked up with the letter 'M'. He spent much of his flying time with No 96 Sqn converting pilots to twin-engined aircraft pending receipt of the Beaufighter. Thus, Haine only occasionally flew AA583, which was later passed on to the Special Duties Flight at Northolt for radar countermeasures work.

35

Boston III AL459/YP-W of Sgt E L Williams, No 23 Sqn, Ford, June 1942

From February 1942 No 23 Sqn began receiving Boston IIIs for use alongside its earlier Havocs. Among the aircraft it received was AL459, which was regularly flown by Rhodesian Sgt Ernest Williams who later achieved acedem with the Mosquito. He flew a number of intruder sorties to the bomber airfield at Caen in this aircraft during the first half of June, but on the 28th AL459 was forced down in France during a sortie to Evreux and Plt Off Coventry and his crew captured.

36

Boston III (Turbinlite) W8343/B of Sqn Ldr K H Blair, No 1453 Flight and No 532 Sqn, Wittering, September 1942

W8343 was built as a Boston III and converted to Turbinlite configuration upon its arrival in the UK. It eventually joined No 1453 Flight, which on 4 September 1942 was redesignated No 532 Sqn. The flight had been commanded since mid 1941 by eight-victory ace Sqn Ldr Ken Blair. On the evening of 23 July 1942 Blair had three successive contacts with enemy aircraft, only to have the frustration of finding that his 'satellite' Hurricane was missing! On No 532 Sqn's formation, Blair became its first CO, although his tenure was brief. On 23 September, with Plt Off Glen as his radar operator, he flew this aircraft on the last flight of his tour – a patrol from Hibaldstow to Wittering in company with a Hurricane flown by Plt Off Dall.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Michael**, *Pursuit Through Darkened Skies*. Airline, 1999
- Bailey, J R A**, *The Sky Suspended*. Bloomsbury, 1990
- Bamford, Joe and Collier, Ron**, *Eyes of the Night*. Pen & Sword, 2005
- Bennett, John**, *Fighter Nights (No 456 Sqn)*. Banner Books, 1995
- Boiten, Theo**, *Bristol Blenheim*. Crowood, 1998
- Braham, J R D**, *Scramble*. William Kimber, 1985
- Brandon, Lewis**, *Night Flyer*. William Kimber, 1961
- Brew, Alec**, *The Defiant File*. Air Britain, 1996
- Brookes, Andrew**, *Fighter Squadron at War (No 85 Sqn)*. Ian Allan, 1980
- Chisholm, Roderick**, *Cover of Darkness*. Chatto & Windus, 1953
- Franks, Norman**, *Fighter Command*. PSL, 1992
- Flintham, Vic and Thomas, Andrew**, *Combat Codes*. Pen & Sword, 2007
- Gillison, Douglas**, *RAAF 1939-1942 (Official History)*. AWM, 1962
- Haine, Gp Capt Richard**, *From Fury to Phantom*. Pen & Sword, 2005
- Halley, James**, *Squadrons of the RAF and Commonwealth*. Air Britain, 1988
- Hamlin, John**, *Flat Out (No 30 Sqn)*. Air Britain, 2002
- Herrington, John**, *Australia in the War 1939-45, Series 3 Volume 3*. Halstead Press, 1962
- Jefford, Wg Cdr C G**, *RAF Squadrons*. Airline 1988 and 2001
- Mason, Francis**, *Hawks Rising (No 25 Sqn)*. Air Britain, 2001
- Onderwater, Hans**, *Gentlemen in Blue (No 600 Sqn)*. Leo Cooper, 1997
- Rawlings, John D R**, *Fighter Squadrons of the RAF*. Macdonald, 1969
- Rawlings, John D R**, *Coastal, Support and Special Squadrons*. Janes, 1982
- Rawnsley, C F and Wright, R**, *Night Fighter*. Wm Collins, 1957
- Shores, Christopher and Williams, Clive**, *Aces High Vol 1 & 2*. Grub St, 1994 and 1999
- Shores, Christopher et al**, *Fledgling Eagles*. Grub St, 1991
- Shores, Christopher et al**, *The Air Battle for Yugoslavia, Greece and Crete*. Grub St, 1987
- Shores, Christopher**, *Dust Clouds in the Middle East*. Grub St, 1991
- Shores, Christopher**, *Those Other Eagles*. Grub St, 2004

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to record his gratitude to the following former Defiant, Blenheim and Havoc aircrew who have given of their time in answering queries and presenting accounts of their actions for inclusion within this volume – Wg Cdr A D McN Boyd DSO DFC, Wg Cdr B A Burbridge DSO DFC, the late AVM E D Crew CB DSO DFC, the late Wg Cdr E C Deanesly DFC, Wg Cdr A A Gawith DFC, the late Gp Capt R C Haine OBE DFC, the late AVM F D Hughes CB CBE DSO DFC AFC, the late Wg Cdr G H Melville-Jackson DFC, the late Wg Cdr J G Sanders DFC, the late Flt Lt J C Surman DFC and the late Air Cdre J G Topham DSO OBE DFC.

INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**. Plates are shown with page and caption locators in brackets.

Adams, 2Lt Burnell William **88**, 88
Addison, WO Nat **60**, **61**, **62**, 64–65, 86
Aitken, Wg Cdr the Hon J W Max **8**, **9**, **27**(42, 93), **47**, 47
Ashfield, Flg Off Glyn 'Jumbo' 22–23

Baldwin, Sgt 'Ginger' **81**, 82
Barker, Sgt Fred **14**, **16**, **17**, **27**, **54**, 54–55, **55**
Barnitt, Plt Off Hes **75**–76
Barwell, Flt Lt Eric G **10**, **15**, **15**, 16–17, **18**, **19**, **25**, **26**,
9(36, 91), **13**(38, 91–92), **55**, 63
Beale, Flt Sgt Albert G **65**, **66**, 66
Benson, Plt Off J G 'Ben' **30**, **32**, 32–33, **33**, **18**(39, 92)
Blain, Sgt Leonard **30**, **32**, **33**, 33
Blair, Sqn Ldr Ken H **36**(45, 94), **69**, 69
Bodien, Plt Off Henry E **21**(40, 93), **48**, **49**, **53**, **57**, 57
Boulton Paul Defiant **6**, **7**, **10**, 66, 85

Defiant I **47**, 49–50; L6957 **15**, 6(35, 91); L6973 **6**,
5(35, 90); L6977 **12**; L7005 **4**, **16**, **14**(38, 92);
L7013 **26**, 9(36, 91); L7018 **16**(39, 92); L7021 **27**,
12(37, 91); L7025 **26**; L7026 **26**, **13**(38, 91–92);
N1535 **26**; N1564 **10**(37, 91); N1636 **33**(44, 94);
N1744 **32**, **24**(41, 93); N1752 **33**, **18**(39, 92);
N1770 **25**(42, 93); N1791 **48**; N1801 **17**(39, 92),
50; N3313 **19**(40, 92); N3328 **21**(40, 93), **57**;
N3333 **31**, **20**(40, 92–93); N3340 **49**; N3377
22(41, 93), **60**; N3437 **52**; T3937 **30**(43, 94), **63**;
T3954 **47**; V1123 **31**(44, 94); AA355 **67**

Defiant II **34**(45, 94), **66**, **67**, **85**
Boyd, Plt Off Archie D McN **22**, **22**, 8(36, 91)
Braham, Flg Off J R D 'Bob' **7**, **28**, **4**(35, 90)
Bristol Blenheim IF **7**–**8**, **10**, **19**, **23**, **28**, **29**, **74**; K7095 **77**;
K7179 **23**(41, 93), **77**; L1105 **25**; L1373 **4**(35, 90);
L1437 **9**; L1514 **11**; L4928 **82**; L6728 **24**; L8526 **81**;
L8540 **81**; L8613 **82**; L8679 **22**, 8(36, 91); L8680
7(36, 91); L8715 **8**, **1**(34, 90); L8716 **9**; L8723 **3**(34,
90); L8726 **2**(34, 90)
Bristol Blenheim IVF **8**, **9**; L9237 **15**(38, 92), **75**; L9394
72; L9446 **24**, **11**(37, 91); T2131 **83**; V6078 **71**;
Z5722 **27**(42, 93), **47**; Z6029 **70**; Z6245 **84**

Britain, Battle of **19**–27
Bruning, Sfw Karl **50**
Bunting, Plt Off Nigel **60**, **61**, 62–63, 87
Burnbridge, Plt Off Branse **68**, 68–69
Burke, Sqn Ldr Pat L **28**(43, 93–94), **53**, **54**, **62**

Carlin, Plt Off Sydney **48**, 48, 59
Chisholm, Flt Lt Rory **28**
Coleman, Flt Lt George **65**
Collis, AC **2** **81**
Cooke, Flt Lt Charles **64**
Cooke, Flt Lt Nicholas **4**, **6**, **10**, **14**, **15**, **15**, **16**, **16**, **17**, **19**, **19**
Corry, Plt Off N H 'Paddy' **29**
Cotes-Predy, Flg Off 'Digger' **73**
Crew, Plt Off Edward **23**, **23**, **24**
Cunningham, Flt Lt John **7**, **8**, **8**, **24**, **1**(34, 90)

Davidson, Flg Off R T P 'Bob' **23**(41, 93), **76**, **77**, **77**,
78–79, **79**
Day, Flt Lt Robert L F **58**, 66
Deaneys, Flt Lt E Christopher **25**(42, 93), 49–50, **51**, **55**,
56, **56**, **58**

Douglas Boston I **29**–**30**; Boston III **35**(45, 94), **67**, **67**, **87**;
Boston III (Turbinlite) **36**(45, 94), **62**, **69**
Douglas Havoc I **30**, **26**(42, 93), **28**(43, 93–94), **29**(43, 94),
32(44, 94), 48–49, **53**, **54**, **57**, **60**, **68**; Havoc II **30**, **62**;
Havoc (Turbinlite) **55**, **61**–**62**, **65**, **69**, **86**; P-70
Havoc **88**, 88

Duke-Wooley, Flt Lt Myles **20**, **20**
Dunkirk **4**, 13–18

Ensor, Flg Off Philip S B **31**, **33**, **29**(43, 94), **46**, **57**, **59**, **61**

Fairweather, Sgt **52**, **53**, **61**
Fletcher, Sqn Ldr A W **24**, **71**, **73**, **84**

Garvin, Sqn Ldr George **25**, **26**
Gash, Sgt Fred **26**–**27**, **30**–**31**, **50**, **50**, **55**
Gawith, Flg Off Alan **33**, **46**, **61**–**62**
Gethin, Sqn Ldr J P D **76**, **79**, **80**
Gillies, Flt Lt Ken **70**

Gracie, Sqn Ldr E J 'Jumbo' **46**
Greek area operations **76**–**80**
Greenhalgh, LAC F D, and Greenhouse, Plt Off P E J **12**
Grenade, HMS **15**

Hackwood, Plt Off Gerald H **15**, **17**, **19**, **16**(39, 92)
Haine, Sqn Ldr R C 'Dickie' **8**–**10**, **11**, **11**–**12**, **34**(45, 94),
47, 66–67, **85**

Hallings-Pott, Sqn Ldr J R **9**, **9**
Hampshire, Wg Cdr Keith **87**–**88**
Hawker Demon and Hotspur **7**
Hayden, Sgt Lawrence H **14**, **50**
Hayton, Flg Off 'Gill' **32**, 49
Head, Plt Off Norman S **30**(43, 94), **63**, **64**
Heinkel He 111P **54**, **54**–**55**, **58**, **58**
Herrick, Plt Off Mike **29**, 29
Hoare, Sqn Ldr Bertie R O B **32**(44, 94), **46**, **57**–**58**, **58**, **65**, **67**
Hodgkinson, Sgt Arthur **24**–**25**
Hope, Flg Off Sir Archie **9**, **10**
Howitt, Flt Lt Geoff **53**, **54**, **68**, **68**
Hughes, Plt Off Dennis L **31**, **32**, **24**(41, 93)
Hughes, Flg Off F Desmond **26**–**27**, **30**–**31**, **17**(39, 92), **50**,
50, **55**
Hunter, Sqn Ldr Philip A **4**, **6**, **6**, **7**, **10**, **12**, **13**, **14**, **15**,
15–**16**, **17**, **18**, **25**, **26**, **5**(35, 90)

Inniss, Plt Off Aubrey **71**, **73**
Iraq operations **80**–**81**

Jacobs, Plt Off Henry 'Jake' **29**
Jameson, Plt Off G E 'Jamie' **33**(44, 94)
Janowiak, Sgt Franciszek **51**, **52**
Johnson, LAC Stanley B **14**, **16**, **18**
Joll, Plt Off Ian K S **8**, **12**, **32**, **7**(36, 91)
Jordan, Oblt Ulrich **20**

Karais, Sgt Jerry **51**, **52**
Kay, Plt Off Desmond **12**, **15**, **15**
Kendall, Sgt Philip **63**
King, Sgt Fred H **6**, **14**, **15**, **16**, **18**, **19**, **25**
Klobouznik, Flg Off **47**

Lancaster, Sgt Aubrey **18**
Lillie, LAC **17**, **19**
Lippett, Cpl Albert **4**, **6**, **14**, **16**, **17**, **19**, **19**

McCormick, Sgt K R **87**
McHardy, Sqn Ldr Edric H 'Sam' **13**, **72**, **73**, **73**, **83**, **84**, **84**
McMullen, Flt Lt Des **48**, **48**, **52**, **53**, **61**
McRitchie, Plt Off Alex **65**
Maggs, Flg Off M H **85**
Malayan operations **81**–**82**
Melville-Jackson, Plt Off George **71**, **71**, **73**
minelaying, aerial **53**, **54**, **62**, **66**
Morton, Sqn Ldr 'Black' **66**, **69**

Netherlands, invasion of the **11**–**13**
Norwegian operations **82**–**84**

Operations: *Archery* **83**–**84**; *Demon* **79**

Pacific operations **87**–**88**
Peacock, Flg Off Reg G **10**, **11**, **12**–**13**, **18**, **19**, **20**–**21**, **23**,
24, **24**, **11**(37, 91), **72**, **73**
Pert, Sgt Eric **71**, **72**–**73**
Pike, Sqn Ldr Jimmie **75**, **76**, **79**, **80**, **81**
Powell, Sgt Sandy W N **22**, **22**
Prinz Eugen **84**, **84**
Pritchard, Flt Lt Charles **29**

Rabone, Flg Off Paul **47**, **47**
radar, airborne intercept (AI) **8**, **9**, **22**–**23**, **23**, **28**, **32**, **67**, **85**
Raphael, Wg Cdr Gordon **47**, **60**, **61**, **62**, **64**–**65**, **86**, **87**
Red Sea operations **74**–**76**
Richardson, Flg Off C W 'Bud' **77**, **77**
Royal Air Force: Coastal Command **70**–**74**; Fighter
Command **6**–**7**; Fighter Interception Unit (FIU) **8**,
22–**23**; No 11 Group, AOC **17**, **49**
Royal Air Force flights: No 1451 **61**–**62**; No 1453 **36**(45,
94), **69**, **69**; No 1459 **65**, **86**, **86**; No 1460 **65**–**66**, **69**;
Special Duties (SDF) **8**, **13**
Royal Air Force squadrons: No 23: **7**, **9**, **19**, **20**, **31**, **33**, **46**,
29(43, 94), **32**(44, 94), **35**(45, 94), **57**, **57**–**58**, **59**, **65**,

67, **67**; No 25: **7**, **8**–**10**, **9**, **22**, **28**, **29**, **29**; No 27: **81**,
81–**82**, **82**; No 29: **7**, **20**, **28**, **4**(35, 90), **46**–**47**, **80**:
23(41, 93), **74**, **76**–**80**, **77**; No 64: **7**; No 68: **27**(42, 93),
47, **47**, **61**; No 85: **26**(42, 93), **47**–**48**, **51**, **53**, **60**, **60**,
62–**63**, **64**, **65**, **68**–**69**, **86**–**87**; No 85 aircrew **61**, **68**;
No 93: **28**(43, 93–94), **53**, **54**, **55**, **62**, **66**; No 96: **34**(45,
94), **47**, **47**, **50**, **56**–**57**, **58**–**59**, **63**, **66**–**67**, **67**, **85**;
No 125: **33**(44, 94), **63**, **66**; No 125 armourers **63**;
No 141: **10**, **19**, **21**–**22**, **30**, **32**–**33**, **33**, **10**(37, 91),
18(39, 92), **58**, **63**; No 141 air gunners **22**; No 143: **83**,
84; No 151: **21**(40, 93), **47**, **48**, **48**, **49**, **52**, **57**, **57**, **61**,
65, **66**, **67**; No 153: **65**; No 203: **15**(38, 92), **74**–**76**, **75**,
79, **80**–**81**; No 219: **24**–**25**, **25**, **2**(34, 90); No 229: **3**(34,
90); No 233: **9**, **9**; No 235: **10**, **11**, **12**–**13**, **14**, **17**–**18**,
20–**21**, **23**, **24**, **11**(37, 91), **70**, **71**, **72**, **73**; No 236:
70–**73**, **71**; No 248: **13**, **70**, **72**, **73**; No 254: **70**, **70**;
No 255: **31**, **31**–**32**, **20**(40, 92–93), **48**, **49**, **49**, **50**–**51**,
52, **58**, **59**, **63**; No 256: **31**, **32**, **24**(41, 93), **25**(42, 93),
49, **51**–**52**, **55**, **56**, **58**, **65**; No 264: **4**, **6**, **6**, **10**, **12**, **12**,
13–**14**, **15**–**17**, **16**, **18**–**19**, **20**, **22**, **23**, **25**–**27**, **26**, **27**,
30–**31**, **5**(35, 90), **6**(35, 91), **9**(36, 91), **12**(37, 91), **13**(38,
91–**92**), **14**(38, 92), **16**, **17**(39, 92), **19**(40, 92), **22**(41,
93), **50**, **50**, **52**, **54**–**55**, **60**, **60**, **85**, **86**; No 264 aircrew
6, **15**; No 272: **73**; No 307: **30**, **51**, **52**; No 489: **83**–**84**;
No 532: **36**(45, 94); No 608: **73**

Royal Australian Air Force squadrons: No 22: **87**–**88**;
No 456: **63**, **64**

Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadrons: No 600: **7**–**8**, **9**, **11**,
11–**12**, **22**, **22**, **29**, **8**(36, 91); No 601: **7**–**8**, **9**–**10**, **10**;
No 604: **7**–**8**, **8**, **12**, **19**–**20**, **23**, **24**, **28**, **32**, **1**(34, 90),
7(36, 91); No 605: **87**

Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons: No 404: **82**–**83**, **84**,
84; No 409: **30**(43, 94), **63**, **63**, **64**; No 410: **31**(44, 94),
63, **64**, **66**; No 418: **87**
Russell, Plt Off Graham **71**, **71**–**72**, **73**

Sanders, Wg Cdr Arthur T D 'Scruffy' **52**, **61**, **62**, **65**
Sanders, Flt Lt James 'Sandy' **47**, **49**, **50**–**51**, **51**, **52**
Sanders, Sqn Ldr Philip J **19**(40, 92)
Scott, Sgt W Jack **55**, **56**, **56**, **58**
Smith, Flg Off Andy **78**, **79**
Smith, Sqn Ldr 'Blackie' **66**, **66**, **67**
Smith, Flt Lt Christopher **13**
Smith, Plt Off Robert R **3**(34, 90)
Smith, Sqn Ldr Roderick **58**
Stuart, Flg Off A I **85**
Sullivan, Sgt **64**, **68**
Surman, Plt Off John **66**, **66**

Tamblyn, Flg Off Hugh N **21**, **21**–**22**, **10**(37, 91)
Tengler, Lt Julius **52**
Thorn, Flt Sgt E R 'Ted' **14**, **15**, **16**, **17**, **25**, **27**, **14**(38, 92),
54, **54**–**55**, **55**
Topham, Plt Off Johnny G **25**, **25**, **2**(34, 90)
Townsend, Flt Sgt J J **66**
Townsend, Wg Cdr Peter W **26**(42, 93), **48**, **53**, **62**
Trautloff, Hptm Hannes **21**
Trousedale, Flt Lt Richard M **31**, **31**–**32**, **20**(40, 92–93), **48**,
49, **49**, **59**
Turner, Sgt Robert C **13**, **17**, **27**

US Army Air Force, 6th NFS **88**, **88**

Verity, Flg Off Victor **47**, **56**–**57**, **58**–**59**, **63**

Waddingham, Plt Off John **30**
Wagner, Sgt Alan **52**
Wake, Sgt F W **56**, **58**–**59**, **63**
Wakefield, Plt Off Ollie **20**–**21**
Walker, Flg Off Derek **74**, **77**–**78**, **79**, **79**
Watson, Plt Off Anthony **15**(38, 92), **74**, **75**, **80**, **80**
Welsh, Flt Lt Terence D **10**, **14**, **15**, **16**, **17**, **26**, **6**(35, 91),
50, **63**
Whitley, Plt Off David 'Bull' **10**, **13**, **14**, **15**, **17**, **18**, **23**, **25**,
27, **27**, **12**(37, 91)
Willans, Flg Off D A **33**
Williams, Sgt Ernie L **35**(45, 94), **67**, **67**
Winn, Sqn Ldr Charles **86**, **86**
Woodman, Plt Off R G **31**(44, 94)
Woodruff, Wg Cdr P H 'Woody' **83**, **84**

Young, Flg Off Michael H **10**, **12**, **14**, **15**, **15**, **16**, **17**, **18**,
26, **22**(41, 93), **60**, **60**

Related Titles - Aircraft of the Aces Series

epub ISBN	PDF ISBN	No.	TITLE
9781780963518	9781780963501	29	Bf 109 F/G/K Aces of the Western Front
9781780963495	9781780963488	68	Bf 109 Defence of the Reich Aces
9781780963587	9781849083485	99	Aces of the Legion Condor
9781780960296	9781849084437	102	MiG-1/3 Aces of World War 2

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

Front Cover

Flt Lt Nicholas Cooke joined No 264 Sqn as a flight commander shortly after it had formed, and he had collected its first Defiant in early December 1939. After the German offensive against France and the Low Countries began on 10 May 1940, Cooke and his gunner, Cpl Albert Lippett, were soon in action. By the time the Allied evacuation from Dunkirk began in earnest they had already claimed victories.

On the late morning of 29 May, a dozen No 264 Sqn Defiants flew over the Channel at medium altitude, with a top cover of Hurricanes that soon became engaged with enemy fighters. Six Bf 109s peeled off to attack the Defiants, which deployed into line astern sections. Flying in L7005/PS-X, Cooke's gunner, Cpl Lippett, spotted a Messerschmitt that was attacking a Defiant and the enemy fighter soon burst into flames under his fire. Having fought off the Bf 109s largely unscathed, No 264 Sqn then spotted a large formation of Ju 87s, with their Bf 110 escort, near Calais. As the latter dived after the Defiants, the RAF pilots again manoeuvred into line astern sections and entered a spiral dive. During the ensuing mêlée, No 264 Sqn claimed six Bf 110s destroyed, and four more Bf 109s that had attempted to intervene. One of each type fell to Cooke and Lippett, who thus became an ace crew.

Having returned to Manston to refuel and rearm, that evening No 264 Sqn crews were back over the beaches, where they spotted several large formations of Ju 87s approaching. With their escort engaged with Hurricanes, the Stukas saw the Defiants and dived away. No 264 Sqn's CO, Sqn Ldr Philip Hunter, did not attempt to follow them, instead leading his fighters down to low level so that the dive-bombers could be caught when they were most vulnerable as they pulled out of their dives. Picking their targets, the Defiant gunners poured fire into the Stukas from close range. Many of the Ju 87s frantically jettisoned their bombs and manoeuvred wildly to escape, but Cooke, once again in L7005/PS-X, positioned his fighter underneath them so as to allow his gunner to pour fire into their vulnerable bellies, as he described;

First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Osprey Publishing
Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 0PH
44-02 23rd Street, Suite 219, Long Island City, NY, 11101, USA
E-mail; info@ospreypublishing.com
© 2012 Osprey Publishing Limited

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission. All enquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978 1 84908 666 0

PDF e-book ISBN: 978 1 84908 667 7

e-pub e-book ISBN: 978 1 78096 438 6

Edited by Tony Holmes

Page design by Tony Truscott

Cover Artwork by Mark Postlethwaite

Aircraft Profiles by Chris Davey

Index by Alan Thatcher

Originated by PDQ Digital Media Solutions

Printed in China through Bookbuilders

12 13 14 15 16 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

© Osprey Publishing. Access to this book is not digitally restricted. In return, we ask you that you use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. Please don't upload this ebook to a peer-to-peer site, email it to everyone you know, or resell it. Osprey Publishing reserves all rights to its digital content and no part of these products may be copied, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise (except as permitted here), without the written permission of the publisher. Please support our continuing book publishing programme by using this e-book responsibly.

Every effort has been made by the Publisher to secure permissions to use the images in this publication. If there has been any oversight we would be happy to rectify the situation and written submission should be made to Osprey Publishing.

'Two shot down in flames at 5000 ft before they had commenced their dive. Remainder of Ju 87s caught at sea level in line astern. On being attacked from below and to one side they released their bombs but three Ju 87s were shot down in very quick succession as we flew up the line. All five Ju 87s were in flames and crashed into the sea or on the beach.'

Of this incredible action, Cpl Albert Lippett wrote, 'We shot at them and they went up in flames. Their main fuel tanks were between the pilot and the navigator, and if they were hit, they just blew up'.

Cooke's day's work was not yet over, for the squadron then engaged a formation of Ju 88s, and he and Lippett combined to claim two of

these destroyed, before turning for home, exhausted. Despite the inevitable, and considerable, overclaiming in such a large and confused dogfight, it had been an outstanding day for No 264 Sqn, which was credited with 37 enemy aircraft shot down. Of these, Cooke and Lippett claimed two Bf 109s, a Bf 110 and five Ju 87s, as well as sharing in the destruction of two Ju 88s. Sadly, theirs was but a brief glory, for on 31 May the team that had claimed a dozen victories in a little over two weeks was posted missing over the Channel.

This specially commissioned art by Mark Postlethwaite shows Cooke and Lippett successfully engaging Stukas over the Dunkirk beaches